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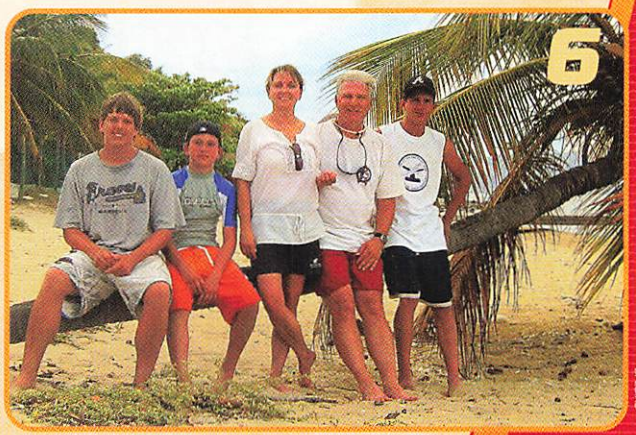
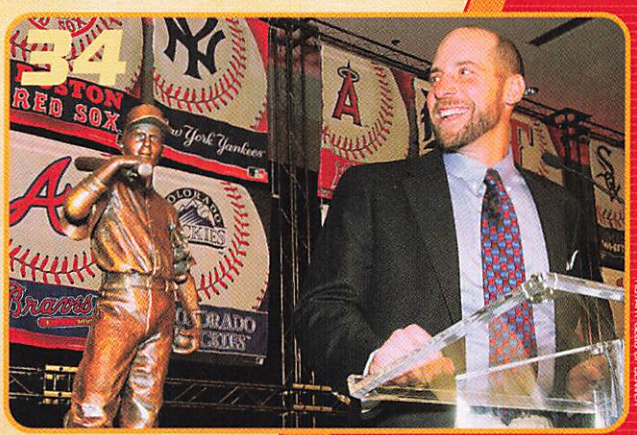


SPECIAL



ROTARY CLUB OF DENVER

STEVE FALL

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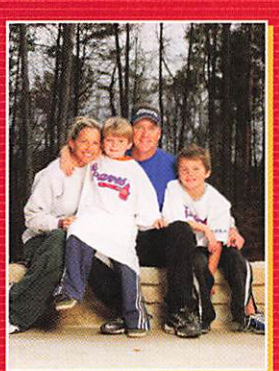

CORRECTION

We inadvertently listed the wrong credit for last month's cover photo of John Smoltz. Jason Spruill took the picture. We apologize for the mistake.

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VOLUME 4, NUMBER 1

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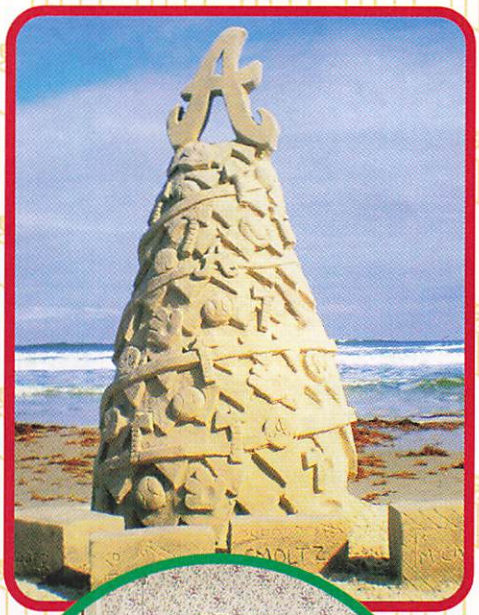

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BALANCING ACT

GROUNDED IN FAMILY, FRANK WREN ALSO IS A HARD-CHARGING, TECH-SAVVY GM

The Wrens, (L-R) Frank, Colby, Jordan, Kyle and Terri, are avid skiers who try to make one major visit to the slopes each year.

SPECIAL

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

THERE'S A NEW MAN in the Braves general manager's chair.

He holds online chats with Braves fans, watches NBC's "The Office," and heads fundraising activities for his sons' high school football booster club. He also seeks baseball talent wherever he can find it, negotiates with high-profile athletes and their high-powered agents, and oversees operations of one of baseball's most-respected franchises.

Frank Wren, 49, became the new guy in charge of the baseball side of Braves operations when John Schuerholz was promoted to franchise president in October. While Wren's personal style might be more laid back than Schuerholz's, his management style is virtually indistinguishable from his predecessor.

Knowledgeable about the smallest details, Wren also focuses on the big picture, creating a vision for the organization and making sure everyone is on the same page. But he picked up on a major managerial skill by watching Schuerholz the past eight years.

"I'm a type-A personality," said Wren. "I like to lead, no matter what it is. One of John's greatest strengths is that he hires good people and lets them do their jobs. That wasn't easy for me 15 years ago. I had to be involved in everything."

Wren's professional baseball career began in 1977 when he played center field in the Montreal Expos minor league system. He reached the Double-A level when a health crisis two years into his career forced him off the field.

"I had a benign brain tumor," said Wren, who is from St. Petersburg, Fla., and attended St. Petersburg Junior College. "Surgery took care of the tumor, but once I got back on the field, playing baseball wasn't fun anymore."

Though he didn't see it at the time, this became a blessing in disguise.

"It made it easier to leave playing the game," he said. "It wasn't fun, so it was easier to stop."

But that didn't mean he was through with baseball.

The end of his playing days in 1982, dovetailed nicely into Wren's interest in computers and their use in baseball, especially in the realm of scouting and player development.

"I didn't have a college degree, but I had baseball experience and was tech and computer literate," said Wren, who began working in the Expos scouting department after stints as a minor league coach and then as general manager of the franchise's New York-Penn League affiliate in Jamestown, N.Y. "I designed a program for the scouting department to use. I was self-taught and very fortunate, timing-wise."

The lack of a college degree didn't hinder him.

"Every time I thought about going back to school to get the

degree, I'd get promoted," he said. "It didn't seem to be a road block, so I let it go."

He moved through the Expos ranks, serving as assistant scouting director and as the director of Latin American scouting and operations. Wren became assistant GM in the Florida Marlins organization in 1991, remaining there until 1998 when he departed to be the GM in Baltimore, a gig that lasted just one year. In 1999, Schuerholz tapped him to serve as assistant GM for the Braves, where once again he had a front row seat during the wheeling and dealing that constitutes major league team-building.

Along the way, Wren married Terri in 1986, and they had three sons, twins Kyle and Colby, 16, and Jordan, 13. Family is an important, defining feature in Wren's life. Sitting in their home, the Wrens talked about how they juggle the never-ending demands of a baseball executive with the needs at home.

"It helped that John (Schuerholz) did this before me," he said. "He was going to (his son) Jonathan's games, visiting his son at school and then in the minor leagues. He'd been through it and understood when I needed to be elsewhere. You have to work at it - plan ahead, go in early, work late."

Terri mentioned the 2005 movie "Fever Pitch," a comedy about a woman in love with a die-hard Red Sox fan.

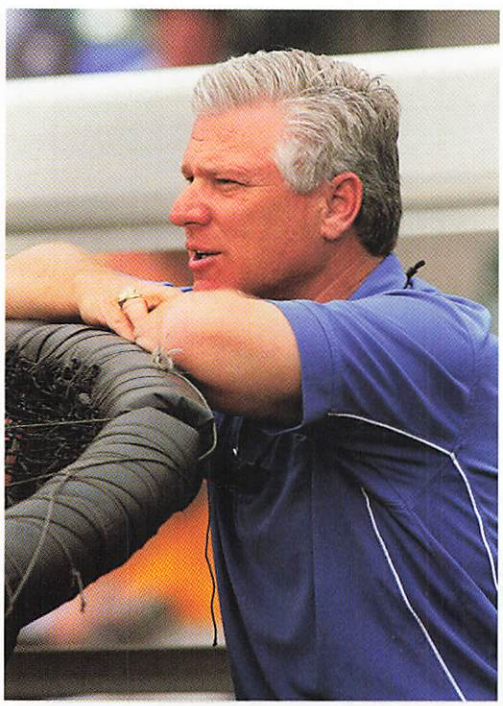
"That's the story of my life," said Terri. "There's a scene where the woman is invited to a wedding, but before she responds, she checks the baseball schedule and sees that not only will the Red Sox be playing the Yankees the weekend of the wedding, but Curt Schilling will be pitching! That's what we do before we plan anything. We always check the (Braves) schedule."

Everything about the Wrens' lives speaks to the primacy of family. In order to maximize their time together, rather than being stuck in traffic, they live in Peachtree City, south of Atlanta.

"Terri researched schools," said Frank. "My chief concern was traffic."

Because the south side traffic volume into Atlanta hasn't caught up to the north side, Peachtree City and Landmark Christian School attracted the Wrens. They live in a close-knit community in a comfortable, two-story home with a finished basement housing an extra bedroom, game room with a pool table, and a home theater that's great for watching sports.

"But the best thing about living in this part of the country is the people," said Terri. "I've always said the greatest feature of our home is our neighbors."



BILL SETLIFF

Even with the boys' sports schedules and activities, home life is a little calmer than it used to be.

"They're all older, and we're not all together at home as much as we used to be," said Terri.

But when the Wrens are all present and accounted for, they often gather in the family room that's decorated to resemble a ski lodge. The only item in the room that doesn't hearken to snow-covered mountains is a 120-gallon salt-water fish tank! Wren built a barn-shaped, cedar-shingled structure housing the tank.

The contrasting motifs - ski lodge and undersea life - draw from the family's favorite activities, diving and skiing. The entire family scuba dives. They took a trip to the Cayman Islands during last year's All-Star break, and

Wren has an extensive and diversified baseball background, but when he's not in his office or leaning on a batting cage, he likes to be with his family on outings like this scuba diving trip.

SPECIAL

Wren sits at his laptop, holding an open forum with fans Nov. 15 during a web chat in which he discussed player personnel issues.

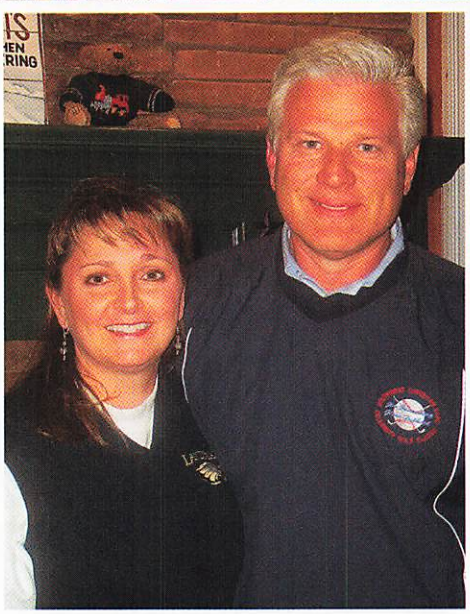
EMILY FENNING/ATLANTA BRAVES

they're avid skiers, as well, usually taking one major ski trip each year.

Their home is elegantly comfortable with Terri's personal taste reflected throughout.

"You move around a lot in baseball," she said. "This was one of the first times we didn't have to keep the walls white!"

In addition to the cozy family room, the downstairs also has a formal living room and dining room, both decorated in an elegant Victorian style. The kitchen was completely remodeled, doubling in size to include a large, polished granite-top island and a separate dining space that's faux-painted to give the rooms a Tuscan feel. The dining area has a cathedral ceiling with a faux-painted window, complete with a wren's nest on the ledge!



PATTY PASMUSSEN

Wren's office, just off the family room, is in the process of being redecorated.

The Wrens are actively involved in their sons' school life at Landmark Christian School. In fact, Wren is the president of the football booster group, The Champions Club, and Terri volunteers and has worked as a long-term substitute teacher. And this past fall, most of the family activities centered on Friday night football games at Landmark's Bill Thorn Stadium.

On Nov. 16, Landmark's War Eagles played Lincoln County in the first round of a Class-A state football playoff. About an hour after Wren returned home from Turner Field, the same day he traded Oscar Villarreal to the Houston Astros and made the Braves' initial offer to Tom Glavine's agent, Gregg Clifton, he and Terri bundled up in their Landmark Christian War Eagles wind shirts and headed to the stadium. The boys were already there, having stayed after school.

The game wasn't scheduled to begin until 8 p.m., but it was Terri's turn to work in the concession stand prior to the game, and Frank was glad to stake out his seats in the bleachers early. Soon after he set up their stadium seats, he realized he'd left his cell phone in the car. He quickly walked back to retrieve it, and then walked around greeting other parents, and his sons - Jordan, who hit up his dad for concession stand money, and Colby, formerly a starting fullback who's missed most of the season due to an injury. Colby helped a classmate carry a cooler to the sidelines. Kyle plays wide receiver, but hasn't seen much action since the team started running the ball more.

Bruce Manno, Wren's new assistant GM, showed up to cheer for the War Eagles. Manno was Wren's assistant in Baltimore and spent the last seven years in St. Louis. He was Wren's first hire as Braves GM.

Also attending the game were Wren's father, Frank Sr., and his brother, Jeff, both of whom live nearby. Unfortunately for the War Eagles, they ran into a buzz saw and lost, 36-15. The disappointing outcome didn't dampen Wren's spirits, at least partly because he's privy to the knowledge that Glavine will accept the Braves' second offer and return to pitch for Atlanta.

Is it strange, Wren is asked, to be making deals, running the Braves, and then to switch gears and attend a high school football game where some people don't even know who he is?

"Sometimes it's a little surreal," he said. "But this is what gives me perspective. I'm grounded in my family. I come home and talk to my wife and help with homework. This is when life becomes real."

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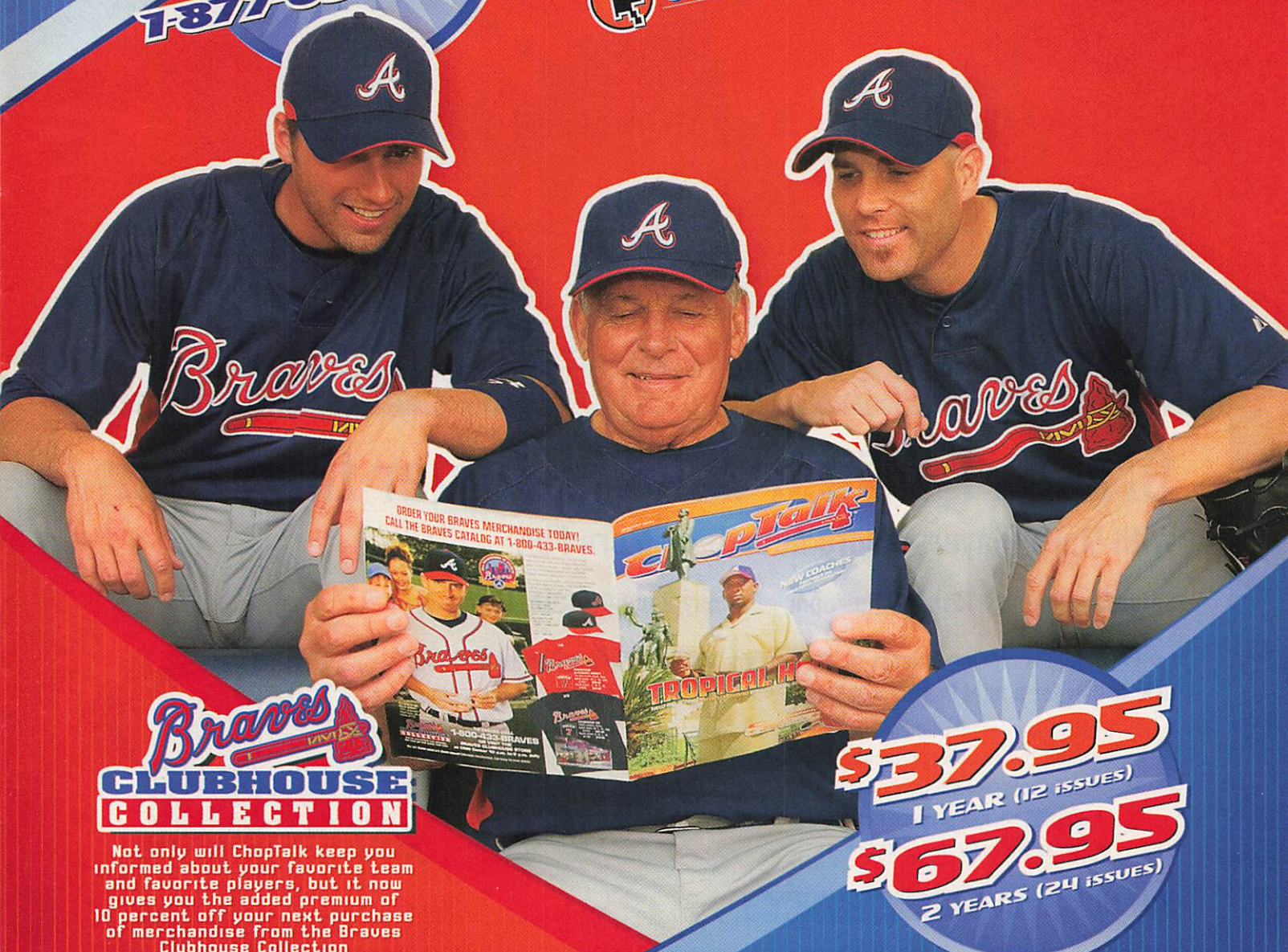

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PAINTING THE CORNERS

BY JAY BUSBEE

WHICH WAY WILL MULTI-TALENTED DIXON GO?

FOUR MONTHS AGO, the name "Dennis Dixon" wouldn't have meant anything to most Braves fans. Even if they knew he was a minor league outfielder with some promising speed, that didn't distinguish Dixon from the hundreds of other hopefuls in the Braves' farm system.

Then the college football season kicked off, and folks started hearing Dixon's name an awful lot. He quarterbacked Oregon, one of college football's early-season surprises, leading the Ducks all the way to a brief stay at the No. 2 spot in the nation. He threw for 2,136 yards and 20 touchdowns until suffering a season-ending knee injury (torn ACL) against Arizona Nov. 15.

But even with the injury, Dixon was a unanimous pick by Pac-10 coaches as the conference's Offensive Player of the Year, was a finalist for the O'Brien Award for the nation's top quarterback, and was a leading candidate for the Heisman Trophy.

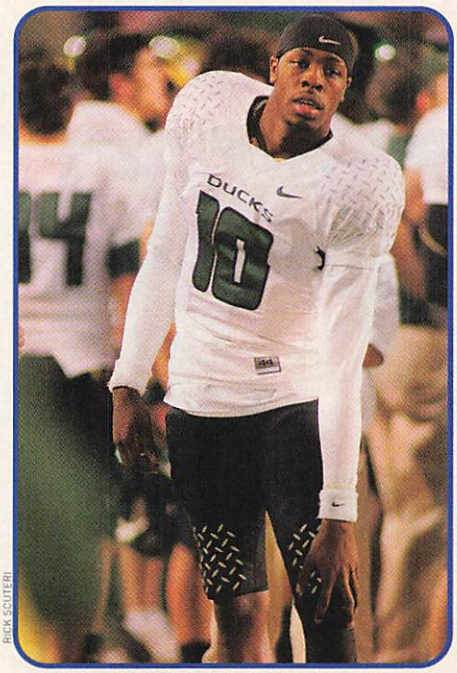
Funny thing about Dixon's stellar season, though - it might end up being a footnote in his career rather than the opening chapter. And Dixon himself might become the latest in a storied line of two-sport Braves.

Dixon's always enjoyed baseball, and even though he didn't play it at Oregon, he has enough natural athletic ability that the Braves were willing to risk a fifth-round draft pick on him in 2007. Dixon spent the summer playing for Danville and the Gulf Coast Braves, but kept in football shape by playing pickup games with teammates.

Published reports from this past summer indicated that coaches at Oregon weren't pleased that he was spending time on the diamond rather than on the gridiron, but Dixon's 2007 season proved he did the necessary woodshedding.

"This is something I've always wanted to do," said Dixon, speaking of baseball. "Even since before I came [to Oregon], baseball was always on my mind. I saw football as another opportunity, and it's worked out."

Dixon's success playing quarterback, the most difficult position in sports, will serve him well as he makes his way through the Braves' farm system. He's capable of learning a phone-book-sized playbook and picking apart hyper-complex, ever-shifting defenses. He's also dealt with the pressure of the Heisman spotlight.



RICK SCUTERI

Dennis Dixon, an outfielder in the Braves' farm system, was a leading candidate for the Heisman Trophy as college football's best player until he tore up his knee Nov. 15.

He's well aware of what the two sports have in common: "Repetition, repetition, repetition. You've got to get your reps in, whether you're looking at a defense or in the (batting) cage. The only way you're going to succeed in either one is if you've done your homework."

Baseball, more so than any other sport, attracts the multidimensional jock. Bo Jackson had the potential to be a Hall of Famer in both sports before injury cut both careers short. Celtics head coach Danny Ainge played for the Toronto Blue Jays before switching to basketball for good. Kenny Lofton played basketball for Arizona in the 1988 NCAA Final Four before logging time with pretty much every team in the majors. Dave Winfield was the only athlete ever drafted by four leagues (baseball, the NFL, the NBA and the old American Basketball Association).

Not that baseball's any easier than those other sports - recall Michael Jordan's struggles during his days in the White Sox farm system.

"I used to think baseball players were wimps," laughs former Brave (and NFL defensive back) Brian Jordan. "But after playing (baseball), I didn't say that any more. You've got to be so tough mentally to bounce back every single day, to play your best every night."

The Braves have experience sharing custody of two-sport athletes. Deion Sanders had a memorable (and for front office officials, headache-inducing) 1992 post-season, shuttling between Braves playoff games and Falcons football games. Had Atlanta beaten Toronto in the 1992 Series, Sanders could well have won the MVP with his .533 average.

Jordan, Sanders' one-time partner in the Falcons' defensive backfield, notched an All-Pro 1991 season but then walked away from football.

"I had to think of my family," Jordan said of his decision. "The way I played football, trying to knock somebody's head off on every play, I knew I wouldn't have a lot of longevity. So I made the switch, and I ended up playing 15 seasons in the majors."

> "I USED TO THINK BASEBALL PLAYERS WERE WIMPS. BUT AFTER PLAYING (BASEBALL), I DIDN'T SAY THAT ANY MORE."
> - BRIAN JORDAN

Dixon's got a long way to go before he can think about a long-term baseball career. For starters, he's got to learn to hit the curve. He hit only .176 in 74 at-bats in 2007. He'll also need to make the call as to whether he's serious about baseball. He hasn't ruled out a trip to the NFL pre-draft combines, and mock drafts project him going in the late first or early second round.

"I'm not sure what I'm going to do yet," Dixon said. "I'm trying to take it all in stride right now. Baseball's what I want to play, but football's definitely still out there."

BRAVO!

JIM BRYANT

Dave Bristol shows off his new ring with Young Harris baseball fans Colleen Urbaniuk (L) and Kelli Fell.

DAVE BRISTOL and Chuck Tanner managed the Braves with distinction, but with little success. Both, however, had long and exemplary careers for which they're still being recognized.

Bristol, who managed the Braves in 1976-77, preceding Bobby Cox's first term, received a Junior College World Series ring Nov. 15 when Young Harris College, located in North Georgia, held its MVP Baseball Dinner. The team was 46-22 last season en route to the Series, and coach Rick Robinson regards Bristol, 74, as an important part of that success, even though he's not officially on the coaching staff.

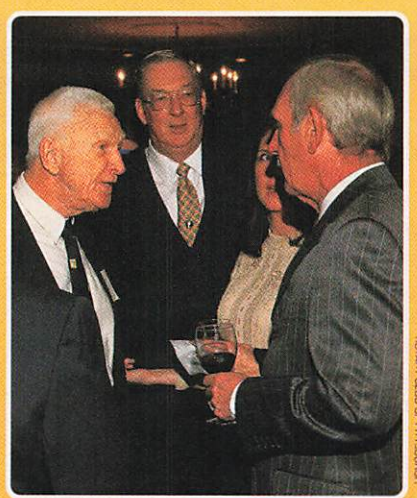
"Dave Bristol is at most practices and games," said Robinson. "Our players enjoy him, and he provides them with many tips that only a major league manger of his experience could give.

"I have never had anyone whose opinion I valued more. He is my bench coach - granted the bench is in the stands - but you can see him before the games and after, on the field with players and coaches. He is the most positive coach I have ever been around."

Bristol, who also managed the Reds, Brewers and Giants, lives in Andrews, N.C., not far from Young Harris. He had a long career as a major league coach, too.

The 78-year-old Tanner, who managed the Braves in 1986-88 after stints with the White Sox, Oakland and Pittsburgh that included the 1979 World Championship with the Pirates, has a new award named in his honor.

The Rotary Club of Pittsburgh presented its first Chuck Tanner Manager of the Year Award to Joe Torre, yet another former Braves manager (1982-84), at a banquet in Pittsburgh Nov. 17.



ROTARY CLUB OF PITTSBURGH

Chuck Tanner (L) chats with former Pittsburgh manager (now with Detroit) Jim Leyland (R) and former closer Kent Tekulve (center), now a Pirates scout.

CARD OF THE MONTH

DALE MURPHY hasn't received much support from the Baseball Writers Association of America in recent elections for the Hall of Fame. This year, though, with a watered-down ballot lacking a true "lock," perhaps Murphy will fare better in the results that will be announced Jan. 8.

Whether or not he makes it to Cooperstown, Murphy's in every

Braves fan's hall of fame for being a great player and a consummate good guy. So, this month's card is a tribute to the two-time National League MVP (1982-83).

This 1989 Topps issue comes from what is known as the "Tiffany set." It's card No. 210 and doesn't have any special value or distinction, but it carries a nice profile portrait of Murphy near the end of his Braves career. We found it selling on eBay for prices ranging from 15 cents to $1.99. Check with your local card dealers (consult the Yellow Pages) or do an internet search to shop for this and other Braves cards for your collection.

MAKE A TOAST

CHOPTALK READERS who enjoyed the story in our November issue about the 100,000-piece Milwaukee Braves collection of Dave Klug ("One-Man Show") will be glad to know he hasn't let a little publicity slow him down. In fact, Klug seems intent on rebuilding the Milwaukee Braves franchise, and perhaps even County Stadium, one piece at a time. About all he's lacking are some players!

Shown here are some glasses, made in 1957 to celebrate the Braves winning the World Series, which Klug recently purchased on eBay. Though he can't confirm their origin, he believes they were commissioned by the wife of Lou Perini, the franchise owner. He says the original set included 28 glasses - 14 highball glasses (4 1/2" each) and 14 water glasses (5 1/2"). Each has the screaming Brave logo on one side and a player likeness on the other. Klug, who lives in Lincoln, Ill., got five water glasses and three highball glasses.

But that's not all... It never is with Klug. Other items he's purchased recently include:

- Two lights from County Stadium, the fixtures that housed the bulbs, Klug explains. Each weighs about 50 pounds.
- Four outfield fence pads, believed to be from County Stadium, that measure 4' x 7' x 6".
- Four padded folding chairs from the County Stadium press box.
- All 11 employee ID passes of Walter Plezek, an usher at County Stadium from 1954-64.
- A heavy 4' x 6' picture of County Stadium consisting of a colorized slide between two panes of plate glass, backlit by fluorescent lights in a wooden case. "It's beautiful," Klug said.
- A game-used bat that belonged to Earl Hersh, whose major league career consisted of 13 at-bats for the 1956 Braves.
- Several rare photos of significant players from that era, including Warren Spahn, Lou Burdette and Gene Conley.
- A complete member kit from the Tom-Tom Club, a fan club.
- Two vintage straw hats with Milwaukee Braves on them.

And he's still looking and buying...

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

REBUILD AN ELBOW

BEFORE JOHN SMOLTZ underwent Tommy John surgery on his right elbow, he had a 3.35 career ERA. Since he had the operation in 2000, he's posted a 3.05 figure. Smoltz is hardly the exception: Many pitchers perform as well or better after this amazing operation than before it.

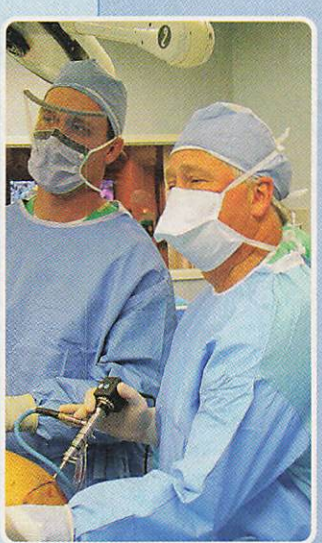
Dr. James Andrews, of the Alabama Sports Medicine and Orthopaedic Clinic in Birmingham, Ala., has operated on Smoltz, Mike Gonzalez and Tyler Yates. He has now performed over 2,500 Tommy John surgeries, named after the first pitcher to have the procedure in 1974 whose career was extended 14 more seasons during which he won 164 of his 288 career victories. While pitchers have it done far more often than players at other positions, Kelly Johnson had the surgery in June 2006.

Tommy John surgery, or ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) reconstruction, only takes Andrews about an hour. He usually has one doctor assist him, along with two or three nurses/physician assistants.

The surgery begins with a four-inch incision on the inside of the elbow. He dissects skin and tissue to expose the muscle layer. After identifying the UCL, he makes an incision in it to expose the joint surface. If present, bone fragments and scar tissue are removed at this stage.

Andrews then uses one of two different tendons for a graft. The first choice is a small tendon from the forearm that about 15 percent of people lack. If that's the case, he instead takes a small hamstring tendon from the leg.

The graft tendon is woven through tunnels drilled in the forearm bone and the upper arm bone, creating a new ligament. He then sews the graft to itself and the underlying native ligament. This may nearly triple the size of the original ligament.



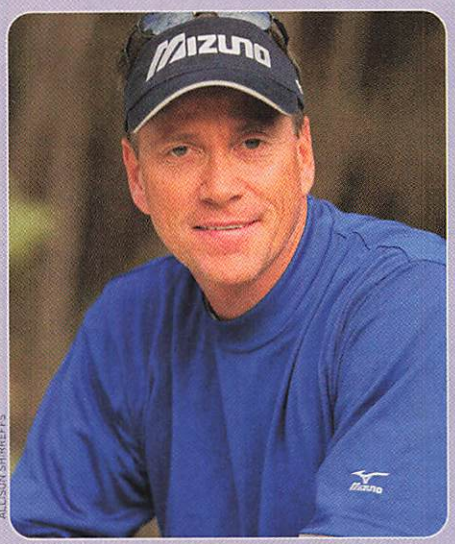
The wound is then closed. After the graft heals for eight weeks, the player begins stretching exercises. He starts throwing 16 weeks after the operation, and builds up gradually over the next four to six months. Pitchers usually return to game action 10-12 months after the surgery.

"The keys to a successful surgery are an early accurate clinical diagnosis, good surgical technique, step-by-step rehabilitation, and patience, patience, patience!" said Andrews, emphasizing the need for players not to rush into game action.

- STEVE FALL

PLAYING PEPPER

TOM GLAVINE



ALLISON SHIRREFFS

INTERVIEW BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

CHOPTALK How does it feel to be back with the Braves, and why did you want to return to the Braves?

TOM GLAVINE It's hard to describe. We still live here, and this is home for us. Coming home every winter for the past five years was something I looked forward to. I haven't been playing here, though, and it's been a juggling act in terms of our family situation and our kids - Chris (wife) and the kids flying back and forth and that sort of stuff. So there's been some difficulty to it. Now I have an opportunity to combine the best of both worlds - to work at home and be around my wife and kids a lot more than I have been the last five years. From that standpoint, I'm ecstatic. There's a flip side to every decision, and there are some friendships I've made in New York that I'll miss. But professionally speaking, this was probably the best and only scenario I would have envisioned for myself to play in 2008.

CT Why did you turn down more money from the Mets to come back to the Braves?

GLAVINE The way my contract was structured in New York for the last year was that I had an option that I would control, at a certain amount of innings pitched, and once I gained that control, I had five days after the end of the season to decide whether I wanted it. When I came home at the end of the season, whether people want to believe me or not, I wasn't sure I still wanted to play. In my mind - and I told the Mets before I left town - there was no way I was going to pick up that option because I knew five days wasn't going to be enough time for me to decide whether or not I still wanted to play. That's the honest truth. I had to come home first, get away from the game, and truly decide whether this was something I wanted to do. Once I came to that conclusion, then it was going to be a matter of figuring out what best suited me. This was the best situation for me. On top of that, I didn't think I was worth $13 million. I don't think I'm that kind of pitcher anymore. There's enough pressure to go out and pitch without the pressure of feeling like every time out there you have to prove to people that you're worth something, worth a certain amount of money. The last two years, I've foregone options in my contract for more money than I ended up making, because I don't view myself as a number-one guy anymore and shouldn't be paid that way. That doesn't mean that on occasion I can't go out for stretches of time and still pitch like a number-one guy. I just didn't want that added pressure.

> Glavine, who turns 42 Mar. 25, said, "I wouldn't have played if this was just a trip down memory lane. At this point, I don't need that."

CT: What convinced you that you wanted to come back and play baseball period, whether for the Braves or anyone else?

GLAVINE Our kids were a big part of it. They wanted Dad to keep playing, especially my two little guys (Peyton, 8, and Mason, 7). They're really getting to the point of appreciating that Dad's a baseball player. They like coming to the park, meeting guys and being around this atmosphere. That was a big part of it. They truly enjoy that aspect of it. For me it's a tough call. I know my competitiveness isn't going to go away overnight. I'm still going to have the desire to go out and put together a game plan and try to execute it to the best of my ability. I think what you have to ask yourself is are you willing to put in the work - that I'm putting in right now - to be ready for spring training? Was I willing to put in the work the four days between starts, because the day you go out and pitch is the easy day. That's the day you live for. The other days you're doing stuff in the weight room, or getting treatment and dealing with all that stuff. Ultimately, I came to the conclusion that I still have something left in my tank. I still want to play the game, and on top of that, finding out that there was an opportunity to do it here at home made it all come together a little easier. Because, honestly, had I decided to play and had I been faced with having to do it somewhere else, I think that would have been the end for me. It's just not worth all those things and being away from my family.

CT What were some of the things you missed that really got to you, that made you say, "I'm not going to do this anymore"?

GLAVINE I missed stuff all the time, whether Little League games or (kids') hockey games... I think the kicker for me was the last weekend of this past season. Chris had her charity event for childhood cancer that she was doing on Saturday, but I gave my boys the option of coming up or staying home, and they chose to stay home. That was it for me. I was faced with: "What are you doing? What's this about?" That was the icing on the cake for me, but I had increasingly felt this past season that my kids were making more and more sacrifices for me. That's not how I was raised, and that's not what I'm about. As a parent, you're the one that's supposed to be making sacrifices for your kids. It got to the point that I saw my kids making the sacrifices for me, whether it was missing ballgames, hockey games, birthday parties with their buddies, having to get on planes two or three times a month. They were doing all that for me, and I didn't feel good about asking them to do that.

> "ULTIMATELY, I CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT I STILL HAVE SOMETHING LEFT IN MY TANK. I STILL WANT TO PLAY THE GAME."

CT Was it just coincidence that the last start of the season was probably the worst start of your career (7 runs in 1/3 of an inning vs. Florida)?
GLAVINE Actually, it was because they decided to come up on Saturday night. Chris had finished her event, and it was clear that Sunday's game was going to mean something, and I was pitching. So they came up. As it turned out, there wasn't a whole lot to be there for.

CT How is your confidence? After the way you finished the season (last 3 starts, 14.81 ERA, 10 1/3 innings, 25 hits, 17 earned runs), is there any doubt in your mind that you can still pitch successfully?
GLAVINE There's no reason for me to believe that I can't pitch anymore based on those last three games. Baseball is a long season, and every year you have stretches where you're really good, really bad, and somewhere in between. I've been playing 21 years, and I've never had a season where a stretch of games (like those) didn't happen. It was unfortunate that they all happened at the end of the season. I think people who don't like me will judge me by those three games, and people who like me will look at my body of work to judge me.

CT What was wrong during that stretch of games? Were you tired, hurt?
GLAVINE I wasn't tired. I wasn't hurt. I felt good, but I wasn't comfortable on the mound, and that meant I wasn't locating well. I wasn't playing my game. It was the only time last season when I felt that, and it started in Florida, again in Washington, and then in the last game. It really was one of those things. It's happened before in my career, and I hope to God it never happens again, but I'm pretty sure that I'll have a few bad ones before next year is over.

CT What type of response do you think you'll get from the fans at Shea Stadium next season?
GLAVINE I think it will be a combination of appreciation for what I did and some booing. I don't think they'll treat me any differently than any other road player, except that I do think there will be some appreciation at first. There are some intelligent fans in New York who really know the game, but then that (appreciation) will be over!

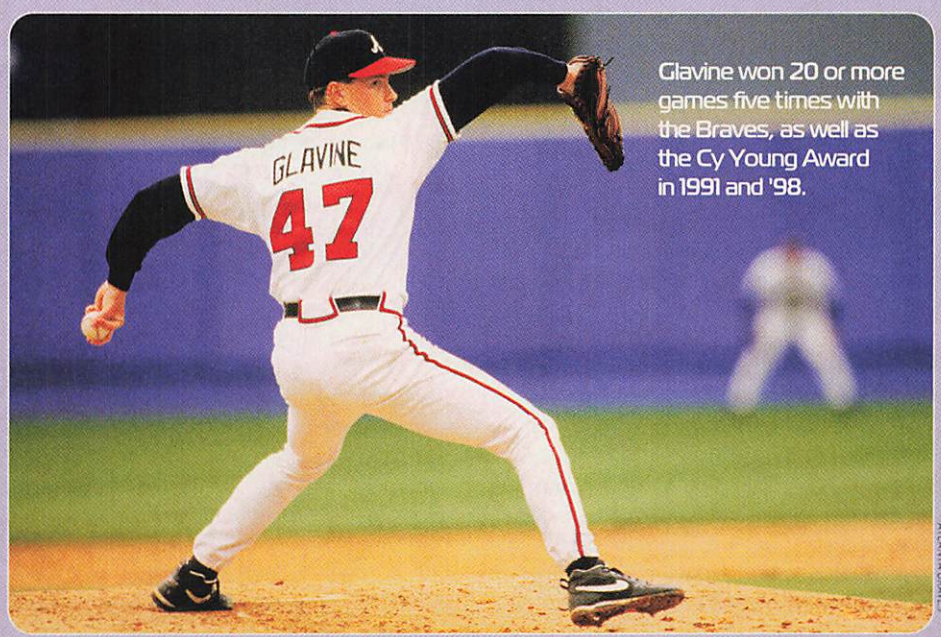
CT What do you think it will be like at Turner Field?
GLAVINE I don't really know and haven't given it much thought until people ask me. There will be 45,000 or so people at Turner Field and I know not all of them will be on my side. This is a fickle business. The only thing I can do is control how I pitch.

CT You'll be 42 years old when the season starts in 2008. How do you know you've still got it?
GLAVINE The only answer to that is that the league will tell you when it's time to go home. I know I can still get people out. Knowing how much I still enjoy pitching and competing makes it worth the effort to stay in shape between starts.

CT: How's your arm? You've been amazingly durable. Why do you think you've been able to stay healthy? Good conditioning? Luck? Genes? Your mechanics?
GLAVINE Genes, mechanics, luck, my style of pitching. All those things account for how long I've been able to pitch. I also have a high tolerance for pain. I pitched with a torn rotator cuff, I've pitched with a broken rib. I don't work harder than anyone else, and I don't have a better program. But I've taken good care of myself and haven't subjected my body to things other people have. I've had a lot of luck.

CT What are your goals, expectations for the upcoming season?
GLAVINE I want to stay healthy. I don't think I'm going to set the world on fire, but I think I can still win a lot of games. If things go right, I think I can win 15-plus games.

CT Are you doing anything different to prepare for the season, anything to compensate for your age?
GLAVINE No. I'm doing the usual stuff I've done the last five years. I work out four days a week in the winter, mix in some cardio work. I'll probably keep up the same thing during the season, those four days between starts.



Glavine won 20 or more games five times with the Braves, as well as the Cy Young Award in 1991 and '98.

ATLANTA BRAVES

CT How did you tell your kids you were coming back to Atlanta? What was their reaction?
GLAVINE We told them the Friday we got the offer from the Braves, and we told them they had to keep it quiet. I have to

ATLANTA BRAVES

Glavine, John Smoltz (holding the 1995 World Championship trophy) and Greg Maddux won seven of the eight NL Cy Young Awards from 1991-98.

hand it to them - they kept their mouths shut! The two older kids, (daughter) Amber and (son) Jonathan (both 13), were happy. They understand what it means that I'll be home more. They also had some disappointment because they liked Connecticut (where the family lived) and the things they got to do up there. My younger sons, Peyton (8) and Mason (7), were more disappointed. They don't know anything but me playing for the Mets. They were just 3 and 2 years old when we went there. But more of their friends have talked to them and said how cool it was that their dad was playing for the Braves, so they're starting to come around. They'll have their first weekend at spring training, get around the guys, and get to visit Disney World, and they'll love it!

CT Did they hang onto their Mets gear?
GLAVINE They still have it. When we told them (about coming to the Braves), they asked, "Do we have to throw this away?" But I told them no, it's an important part of their lives and their memories.

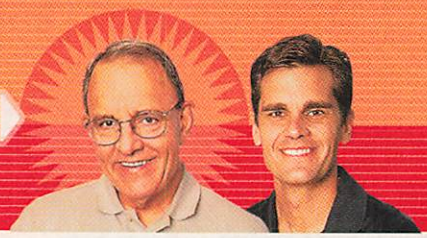
CT Have you talked with John Smoltz about coming back? What did he have to say?
GLAVINE I've been in touch with Smoltz a lot, and I think he's probably happiest that he has someone his own age to talk to now. He'll have someone to vent with. I'm looking forward to being back in the rotation with him and seeing how we do. I don't know how much of the "glory days" we can recapture, but I hope we can be part of a rotation that helps get this team back in the playoffs and start another run.

CT Did you have any regrets about leaving the Braves?
GLAVINE There are big moments in all of our lives when things happen and decisions are made, and we can look back at that decision and think, "If this conversation had gone a little differently" or "If this situation had gone this way." Of course, I've had those thoughts. At the same time, I'm a pretty strong person in my faith, and I think things happen for a reason. You don't always understand the reasons. You just have to make adjustments to the decisions you make and the things that happen in your life. Did I miss being in Atlanta for the last five years? Of course I did. It's home. Life is much easier here. Does that take away from the experience I had in New York? No. I think having the opportunity to see another organization and how it works was good. My children and wife having the opportunity to experience another city, especially that city, was really cool for them. We made great friendships up there.

CT Would you have come back if you thought the Braves didn't have a chance to win?
GLAVINE No, I wouldn't have played if this was just a trip down memory lane. At this point, I don't need that. I still feel like I have some things left in my tank. I'm not going to sit here and tell you I'm going to win 20 games - but I'm not telling you I won't, either. I pitched a lot of good games last year, and I feel I can still do that. Looking at this team, there's a lot to like. They were in the top three in runs scored, up there in team batting average. I think the biggest need, looking at this team from the other bench, was depth in their starting pitching which was something that for so many years was a staple of this organization. If you look at other teams, that's what makes them successful - depth in their rotation and in their pitching staff in general. I think I provide that. I can come in here, win my fair share of games, pitch 200 innings, and more than anything else, the number of innings I pitch could be the big difference maker because it's going to take the pressure off Tim (Hudson) and John and the bullpen having to cover those innings over the course of the year. I know how Bobby feels, and every manager in baseball will tell you the same thing. If you can go into spring training and look at your top three guys and, barring something happening, know you can pencil in 600 innings out of those three guys, you're in pretty good shape. Not many teams can do that.

> "I DON'T THINK I'M GOING TO SET THE WORLD ON FIRE, BUT... IF THINGS GO RIGHT, I THINK I CAN WIN 15-PLUS GAMES."

CT Was it tough being under the scrutiny of the NY media?
GLAVINE It thickened my skin a little bit. When you're talking about New York, a lot of people talk about that side, the negative side, and there is a negative side. But it's the extremes on both ends. There are not many better places to be when you're doing well, and there's for sure no worse place to be when you're not doing well. You try your best to stay on the good side of things, but there's a different level of volume, the soap opera aspect to it, that you don't see in other places.



SOUTHPAW STARTERS NEED HAZARD INSURANCE

IT SEEMS LIKE IT'S A TOUGH JOB being a starting left-handed pitcher for the Braves. Fans are blogging up a storm, still upset with Tom Glavine for representing his union years ago and for leaving the Braves for more money to pitch in New York.

How many of us would turn down a huge raise to take a new job? As to the union stuff... all Glavine did was try to be available to the press to answer questions about the players' position during the strike. In retrospect, he made himself too available - but at least he didn't run and hide.

Before you rip Glavine, try to remember the eight innings of one-hit ball he pitched in Game 6 of the 1995 World Series to win Atlanta it's only world championship in any major professional sports league. He should be welcomed back with open arms.

And then there's Mike Hampton. The same bloggers are mad at him for being hurt all the time.

Do they think he gets hurt on purpose? Of course, he doesn't!

Hampton's had a star-crossed few years, and I hope he is able to come back and pitch effectively in 2008.

Yes, he's been paid an awful lot of money, but he didn't wear a mask and brandish a gun to force management into giving him the money. He desperately wants to pitch. Whether he will be physically able or not remains to be seen.

SINCE WE LAST VISITED a lot has gone on with the Braves that should make for a very interesting season ahead. First, John Schuerholz moved up to the team's presidency, and Frank Wren is the new general manager. I'm happy for John. He deserves a reward like this for the job he did during his tenure as Braves GM, and having him still close to the scene should make all Braves fans happy.

And I'm also happy for Frank. He deserves a legitimate chance to prove he can be a successful major league general manger. He had one previous chance, but it wasn't legitimate. He was the GM in Baltimore under the ownership of Peter Angelos and really never got a chance to make his own decisions due to interference from on high.

Then, after Frank came to Atlanta as assistant GM, he was offered the Pittsburgh Pirates general manager's job and turned it down... preferring to gamble that he would someday get the Braves' job rather than trying to prop the Pirates up without the financial resources to consistently compete.

Frankly, I thought he made a mistake not taking the Pittsburgh job, but he's been proven to be right, and he's already shown a willingness to pull the trigger on deals. Frank is his own man - but I'm sure he would agree that it's nice to have Schuerholz there as a sounding board. I think Wren will do fine.

THE BARRY BONDS STORY continues to be a big and a sad one. He's an undeniably great player who can't get a job despite the fact that he is (like it or not) the all-time home run king.

In the eyes of the fans, and apparently in the eyes of the federal government, he has become the poster boy for all that is wrong with baseball in the steroid era. All this and he has never flunked a drug test.

Bonds will go on trial for allegedly perjuring himself when he denied that he had ever knowingly used performance-enhancing drugs.

Wouldn't you think that some American League team would give him a shot as a designated hitter? He apparently carries too much baggage - but it's hard to believe that his undeniable talent as a hitter is being ignored by everyone.

If he's found guilty and sentenced to prison, his contract would be voided, so that's not a cogent argument. It's a sad tale that will continue to play out throughout another baseball season.

I WRITE THIS BEFORE CHRISTMAS... so Merry Christmas to all, and to all... good night. And since you'll receive this around the first of the New Year, happy 2008, as well!

EDITOR'S NOTE

Skip Caray and Chip Caray alternate months in this space, so watch for Chip in February. Skip will be back here in March.

KYB KNOW YOUR BRAVES

JO-JO REYES #37

2007 STATISTICS

W-L	ERA	G	GS	IP	H	R	ER	HR	BB	SO
2-2	6.22	11	10	50.2	55	39	35	9	30	27

BASICS

FULL NAME	JOSEPH ALBERT REYES
POSITION	Pitcher
VITALS	Bats/Throws ..... Left/Left Height ..... 6-2 Weight ..... 230 Age 23
BORN	November 20, 1984 West Covina, Calif.
CONTRACT ACQUIRED	Eligible for renewal. Signed by Braves after selection in second round of 2003 draft (43rd pick overall.)
PERSONAL	Single.

CAREER

READY FOR PRIME TIME
Was 8-1 with a 3.56 ERA at Mississippi and 4-0 with 1.00 ERA at Richmond last year (combined 2.72 ERA) before promotion to Atlanta.

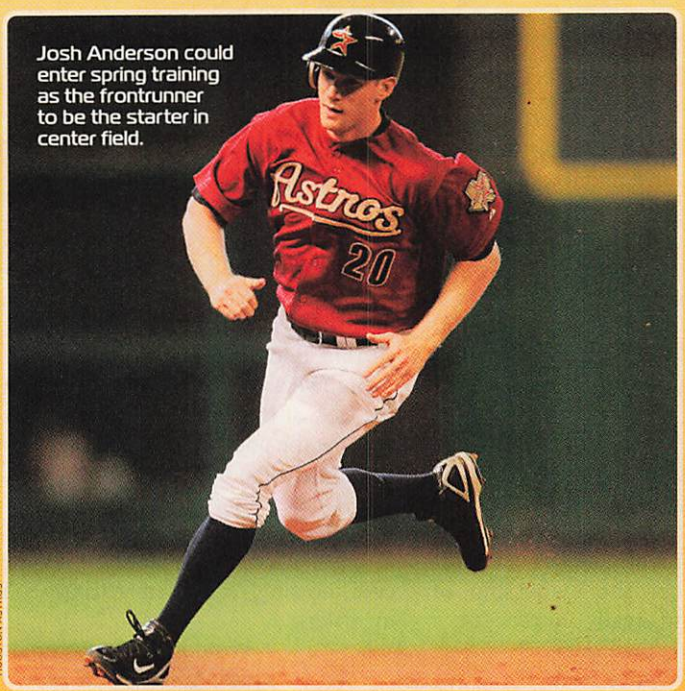
FAMILIAR TERRITORY
Made major league debut last July 7 at San Diego, just 100 miles from his Riverside, Calif., home, starting in place of disabled John Smoltz.

POSITIVE TREND
Won two of last three starts, posting 3.18 ERA in combined 17 innings against Florida, Milwaukee and Houston.

IMPRESSIVE UPBRINGING
Led farm system with 12 wins and 142 strikeouts in 2006 when he was Rome Braves Pitcher of the Year and South Atlantic League All-Star.

PHOTO

ALLISON SHIRREFFS



Josh Anderson could enter spring training as the frontrunner to be the starter in center field.

HOUSTON ASTROS

PICKING UP SPEED

WHO WILL PLAY CENTER FIELD for the Braves in 2008 remains to be seen, but a candidate was acquired Nov. 16 when new general manager **Frank Wren** sent versatile righthander **Oscar Villarreal** to Houston in exchange for **Josh Anderson**.

The 25-year-old Anderson made his major league debut in September and did so in impressive fashion. After hitting .273 last year at Triple-A Round Rock, where he stole 40 bases in 48 attempts (83.3 percent), Anderson batted .358 (24-for-67 in 21 games) for the Astros with a .413 on-base percentage. Houston's fourth-round pick in the 2003 draft, Anderson led all of baseball in steals (79) in his first full pro season (2004) when he split time between Class-A Lexington and Salem. In 2005, he led the Double-A Texas League with 50 steals.

Anderson, who bats left and throws right, is a native of Kentucky and attended college at Eastern Kentucky where he led the nation in steals (57) in 2003. He's a .290 career hitter in four minor league seasons, averaging 52 steals per year.

Villarreal had a 4.54 ERA in 51 games last year.

TWO FOR ONE!

The Braves filled two obvious needs Dec. 4 when they traded promising right-handed reliever **Jose Ascanio** to the Cubs for lefty reliever **Will Ohman** and utility infielder Omar Infante, a likely backup for **Yunel Escobar** at shortstop.

Ohman, 30, was 2-4 with one save and a 4.95 ERA in 56 games for the Cubs last year when he held left-handed hitters to a .236 average (.325 vs. right-handed batters). Lifetime, he is 6-8 with a 4.33 ERA and one save in 220 games, all as a reliever with the Cubs. In 160 innings, he's given up 143 hits (17 home runs) with 84 walks and 166 strikeouts.

Infante, 26, was obtained by the Cubs in November from Detroit, where he hit .277 in 166 at-bats last season. In six years with the Tigers, he compiled a .253 batting average. His best season was 2004 when he had a career-high 503 at-bats and hit .264 with 16 home runs, 55 RBIs and 13 steals. A strong fielder, he can play second, short or third and has played a little outfield.

Ascanio, 22, was 1-1 with a 5.06 ERA for the Braves last year after going 2-2 with 10 saves and a 2.54 ERA at Mississippi.

FAMILIAR FACE

Tom Glavine is back. The 303-game winner signed a one-year contract with the Braves Nov. 19 and is expected to fill the No.-3 spot in the starting rotation behind **John Smoltz** and **Tim Hudson**. Originally signed and developed by the Braves, the lefthander won the first 242 games of his career for Atlanta before playing the last five seasons with the Mets.

The Braves forfeited their first-round pick in this June's draft (No. 18 overall) to the Mets for signing Glavine, a Class A free agent. Read much more about Glavine on pages 14-16 and elsewhere in this issue.

MOVING ON

Lance Cormier was designated for assignment Dec. 1 to make room on the 40-man roster for **Tom Glavine**, and then on Dec. 7, the Braves asked waivers on Cormier for the purpose of giving him his unconditional release.

Willie Harris was designated for assignment Dec. 4 to make room on the roster for **Will Ohman** and **Omar Infante**, who were acquired for **Jose Ascanio**. Harris was not tendered a contract and thus became a free agent.

Additionally, **Pete Orr** was designated for assignment Nov. 20.

Lefty reliever **Ron Mahay** was offered arbitration. However he declined, which will give the Braves a "sandwich" compensation draft pick between the first and second rounds in June, assuming Mahay signs elsewhere. Arbitration was not offered to free agents **Octavio Dotel**, **Julio Franco**, **Andruw Jones** and **Chris Woodward**.

NOT AGAIN...

The Braves' hopes that **Mike Hampton** would be able to make seven starts in the Mexican Winter League in preparation for spring training were dashed after the injury-plagued lefthander worked just one inning. Hampton, who missed the last two seasons due to arm injuries, was expected to work two or three innings in his first outing Nov. 22 for Navajoa. However, he had to come out of the game after one inning due to a right hamstring strain sustained making a fielding play.

Hampton tried to warm up for the second inning but could not continue. In that one inning, he gave up one hit and recorded one

strikeout. The 35-year-old who is entering the last year of his contract likely will not pitch again in Mexico, but the Braves hope he'll be healthy enough in the spring to compete for a spot in the rotation. Prior to the setback, Hampton reportedly was throwing well during rehab.

ROSTER ADDITIONS

The Braves added three right-handed pitchers to their 40-man roster Nov. 20 by purchasing the contracts of **Jairo Cuevas**, **Charlie Morton** and **Zach Schreiber**.

Cuevas, 23, spent last season at Myrtle Beach (advanced Class A), making 25 starts and compiling a 6-12 record with a 3.55 ERA in 132 innings. He was originally signed as a non-drafted free agent in March 2003.

Morton, 24, appeared in 41 games, six starts, with Mississippi (Double A). He had a 4-6 record with 4.29 ERA in 79.2 innings. He excelled in the Arizona Fall League, where he was 4-1 with a 2.57 ERA in six games, five of them starts, for Peoria. A third-round draft pick in 2002, Morton allowed only 15 hits in 21 innings in Arizona, striking out 20 and walking just eight.

The 25-year-old Schreiber split last season between Mississippi and Richmond. In 34 games at Mississippi, he was 3-5 with five saves and a 2.22 ERA. At Richmond, he was 1-1 with one save and a 2.43 ERA in 24 games. He was a 16th-round draft pick in 2004.

The Braves also activated infielder **Willy Aybar**, lefthanders **Mike Gonzalez** and **Mike Hampton**, and righthander **Anthony Lerew** from the 60-day disabled list.

SHORT HOPS

- **Chipper Jones** finished sixth in the MVP voting that was won by Philadelphia shortstop **Jimmy Rollins**.
- Arbitration-eligibles **Mark Teixeira**, **Rafael Soriano**, **Mike Gonzalez**, **Matt Diaz**, **Tyler Yates** and **Omar Infante** were tendered contracts.
- Braves pitchers and catchers are scheduled to report to Disney's Wide World of Sports near Orlando, Fla., Feb. 14, with their first workout the next day. The remainder of the roster is due to report Feb. 19, with the first full-squad workout Feb. 20.

FRANK WREN
GENERAL MANAGER

GLAVINE GIVES US THE DEPTH WE MISSED FOR TWO SEASONS

AS WE CAME OUT OF OUR ORGANIZATIONAL MEETINGS in October, it was apparent that not only did we feel Yunel Escobar was ready to play every day, but we also felt there was a good market for Edgar Renteria. I'd had preliminary discussions with (Tigers GM) Dave Dombrowski in the summer about their needs, and shortstop was an area he mentioned they would be looking at to strengthen their club.

We started the process of identifying who in their organization would be the type of players who would strengthen our organization and be close to being ready to play in the majors. We were primarily trying to improve pitching (Jair Jurrjens), but then we also were able to get a young centerfielder (Gorkys Hernandez) that really improves our speed and we think probably is the fastest player in our organization.

Jurrjens kind of looks like a bookend to Jo-Jo Reyes. He's young, dynamic and very close to the majors. He could come out of spring training with the big club or be at Triple-A, just like Jo-Jo.

Hernandez will more than likely start at Myrtle Beach. He's very highly thought of, and our scouts think he can be an outstanding centerfielder.

Then we acquired Josh Anderson from Houston for Oscar Villarreal. We like him a lot. He has great speed. In his first opportunity to play in the majors, he played well in September. He gives us someone in center that is more experienced than Jordan Schafer (hasn't played above advanced Class A). Anderson has a chance to start in center. He's played in the majors and excelled, even though it was for a very limited period.

> "HE'S (JAIR JURRJENS) YOUNG, DYNAMIC AND VERY CLOSE TO THE MAJORS. HE COULD COME OUT OF SPRING TRAINING WITH THE BIG CLUB."

Then we turned our attention to starting pitching. We thought Tom Glavine was a perfect fit from a number of standpoints. From a leadership standpoint, we all know what he brings, on and off the field. And we know what he can do to our rotation - strengthen and deepen it, the things that we missed the last couple of years that kept us out of the post-season. Signing Tom took a lot of pressure off.

So with Glavine and Jurrjens, we added two starters that give us depth, and we also hope Mike Hampton will be able to return.

We went to the winter meetings looking to fill some smaller but still very important needs in putting together the team. The week before the meetings, we found out by talking with (Cubs GM) Jim Hendry that we had a match around Will Ohman and Omar Infante. They both filled needs for us.

Ohman is a veteran lefthander who's been excellent away from Wrigley Field the last three years. If he's pitching for the Braves, that's not a problem, because we only play three games there. If that was a one-year trend, we might say it's just one of those things. But for three years, he's had a consistently difficult time at Wrigley.

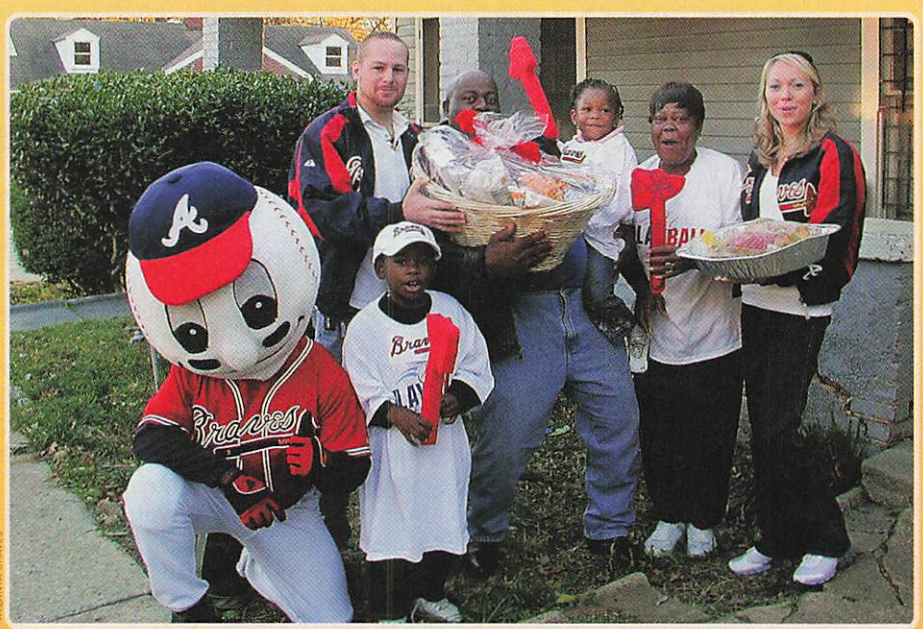
The term "super utilityman" gets used a lot, but Infante plays all three infield positions, besides first base, and all three outfield spots - and plays them well. He also has a history that he can hit. He really fills a need. Having a veteran like that gives us depth and strengthens the club.

As we go into the New Year, we'd still like to add even more depth in the bullpen, if possible, and also find a stopgap centerfielder so we don't have to push the young guys so fast.

It's been a whirlwind first two months, but I'm fortunate to have worked with everyone on the staff the last seven years. The transition has been smooth. John (Schuerholz) has been very helpful with his advice and encouragement. He's been very supportive.

It's an exciting time for me. The off-season is precious. It's a time to re-group and spend time with family, but I can't wait for spring training.

GOBBLE! GOBBLE!



ATLANTA BRAVES

CHUCK JAMES and his wife, **Julie**, went door-to-door in the Turner Field neighborhood, distributing baskets filled with Thanksgiving provisions, including stuffing, vegetables, desserts and Cajun Turkeys donated by Popeyes Chicken & Biscuits Nov. 16. Ten families, selected by the Georgia Avenue Food Co-op, received the Thanksgiving baskets from the Atlanta Braves Foundation during the annual "Turkey Drop."

Chuck and Julie James, along with Homer, pay a Turkey Drop visit to Richard and Bridget Towns and family.

BANQUET CIRCUIT

Fans in various parts of the country have a chance to see some Braves who are making speaking engagements this month.

Bobby Cox will be the speaker Jan. 11 when the Syracuse (N.Y.) Chiefs hold their 47th annual Hot Stove Dinner. The event is at the Holiday Inn on Electronics Parkway.

Cox played third base for the Chiefs in 1970 as an infielder on a team that won the Governors Cup and participated in the Little World Series. He then managed the Chiefs from 1973-76. The 1976 team won the Governors Cup, the last time it was won in franchise history.

The event begins at 5:30 p.m. with a silent auction, and dinner is at 7 p.m. Tickets are $45 for adults and $20 for children. Information and tickets are available by calling (315) 474-7833 or at Alliance Bank Stadium.

Jeff Francoeur will be the speaker at the Charleston (S.C.) RiverDogs' fourth annual Hot Stove Banquet Jan. 18 at Mark Clark Hall on The Citadel campus. The reception and auction begin at 6:30 p.m., with dinner at 7:30. Tickets are $65 per person, which includes dinner, beverages and admission to the auction. For tickets and additional information, contact the RiverDogs at (843) 723-7241 or visit riverdogs.com.

John Smoltz will speak at the annual fundraiser for the Furman University baseball team Jan. 23 at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Greenville, S.C. The dinner/program begins at 7 p.m., and will be preceded by a private reception at 5:30 p.m.

Tickets are $100 per person, which includes dinner. To attend both the dinner and the reception, tickets are $120. Tickets can be reserved by calling the Furman baseball office at (864) 294-2146. All proceeds benefit the Furman baseball team.

SPRING TEE TIME

Tim Hudson is hosting his third annual "Birdies & Baseball" event Feb. 24-26 in Orlando, Fla., to benefit the Aflac Cancer Center and Blood Disorders Service of Children's Health Care of Atlanta. The all-inclusive $2,500 entry fee for the 3-day, 2-night event includes round-trip airfare from Atlanta to Orlando, hotel room, ground transportation, three meals on Sunday and Monday and breakfast on Tuesday, invitation to the draw party at the JW Marriott, two days of golf with Braves players at the ChampionsGate Resort, attending Braves practice, a meet-and-greet with Hudson, and more.

Call (404) 785-7373 or visit choa.org for information or to sign up. The event is limited to 80 golfers.

FANFEST

The first Braves FanFest to be held outside Turner Field is scheduled Jan. 12-13 at the Georgia World Congress Center. The Saturday session is from 10 a.m.-6 p.m., and the Sunday session is 10 a.m.-5 p.m. FanFest includes player appearances and autograph opportunities, along with games and activities for the entire family.

Tickets are available at Braves.com/FanFest, the Turner Field box office, by calling 1-800-326-400, and at TicketMaster locations. Two-day passes purchased in advance are $18 for adults and $12 for children 12 and under. The walkup price is $20 and $15. One-day passes are $12 and $8 in advance and $15 and $10 at the gate. There will be no other charge for any activities - including autographs.

The World Congress Center is located in downtown Atlanta at 285 Andrew Young International Blvd., adjacent to the CNN Center and only two miles from Turner Field.

HO! HO! HUDDY!

Tim Hudson and his wife, **Kim**, spread some major holiday cheer Dec. 12 when they welcomed 75 children from the Make-A-Wish Foundation at the Toys "R" Us store in Buckhead for a shopping spree and holiday party. Each child from the Make-A-Wish Foundation and their siblings received a $50 Toys "R" Us gift card, compliments of the Hudson family. Before shopping for their favorite toys with Tim and Kim, the children enjoyed milk and cookies, face painters, and story time during a festive holiday party

BALLS & STRIKES

- Trade publication Baseball America presented a Lifetime Achievement Award to **John Smoltz**, **Tom Glavine** and **Greg Maddux** on Dec. 4 during the Winter Meetings in Nashville. Only Smoltz was present to accept. The trio pitched together with the Braves from 1993, when Maddux signed as a free agent, until 2002, after which Glavine signed with the Mets.

- **Jeff Francoeur** was the guest speaker for the Spirit of Christmas event at Marcus Pointe Baptist Church in Pensacola, Fla., Dec. 9.

- Braves minor league outfielder and University of Oregon quarterback **Dennis Dixon** was honored Dec. 4 in New York by the National Football Foundation as one of 15 National Scholar-Athletes. He received an $18,000 post-graduate scholarship. Dixon completed requirements for his sociology major in June with a 3.33 GPA and graduated in December.

BOBBY COX

MANAGER

I LIKE WHAT WE HAVE DONE TO IMPROVE OUR ROSTER

I THINK WE HAVE A REALLY GOOD TEAM. Getting Tom Glavine early in the off-season answered a question about our starting rotation. It also gave us a huge lift, to the organization, to the players. Everyone was happy about Tom coming back, and it really relaxed us because we knew we had that piece of the team.

Leadership-wise, you can't find too many players who can offer as much as Glavine. We'll have a lot of young pitchers who'll be learning from him and Smoltz.

We hated to give up Edgar Renteria, but we got a couple of young guys, pitcher Jair Jurrjens and outfielder Gorkys Hernandez, in return. A month later, we got Will Ohman, a strong lefty. He had an ERA under 2.00 away from Wrigley Field last year (1.45 in 29 games). We'd like to see him do that for us!

We have more pitching depth than we've had in years. The balance of our strength has shifted back to pitching. We have so much depth to work with and to evaluate. I really think that's going to help us the most.

We'd like to see Mike Hampton come back and make the starting rotation. Chuck James had a good season, and there are a number of other pitchers who filled in for us last year.

Jo-Jo Reyes and Jeff Bennett pitched well for us at the end of the season and will definitely be looked at. Jurrjens may be part of the mix.

There are a lot of guys who will be looked at and who have a very good shot of making the rotation. It's a good problem to have.

I see (Rafael) Soriano starting as our closer and staying our closer unless something major occurs. We've got guys like Manny Acosta and Peter Moylan to set him up.

> "WE HAVE MORE PITCHING DEPTH THAN WE'VE HAD IN YEARS. THE BALANCE OF OUR STRENGTH HAS SHIFTED BACK TO PITCHING."

We still need to replace Andruw Jones in center field, and it's been an ongoing process. Frank Wren has looked around at other centerfielders, and we haven't really seen anyone that we thought would do that much better than what we have - Jordan Schaefer in our minor league organization, and Josh Anderson, who we got from Houston. We know they're young, but they're very strong defensively, and we think if we needed to use them, they will do.

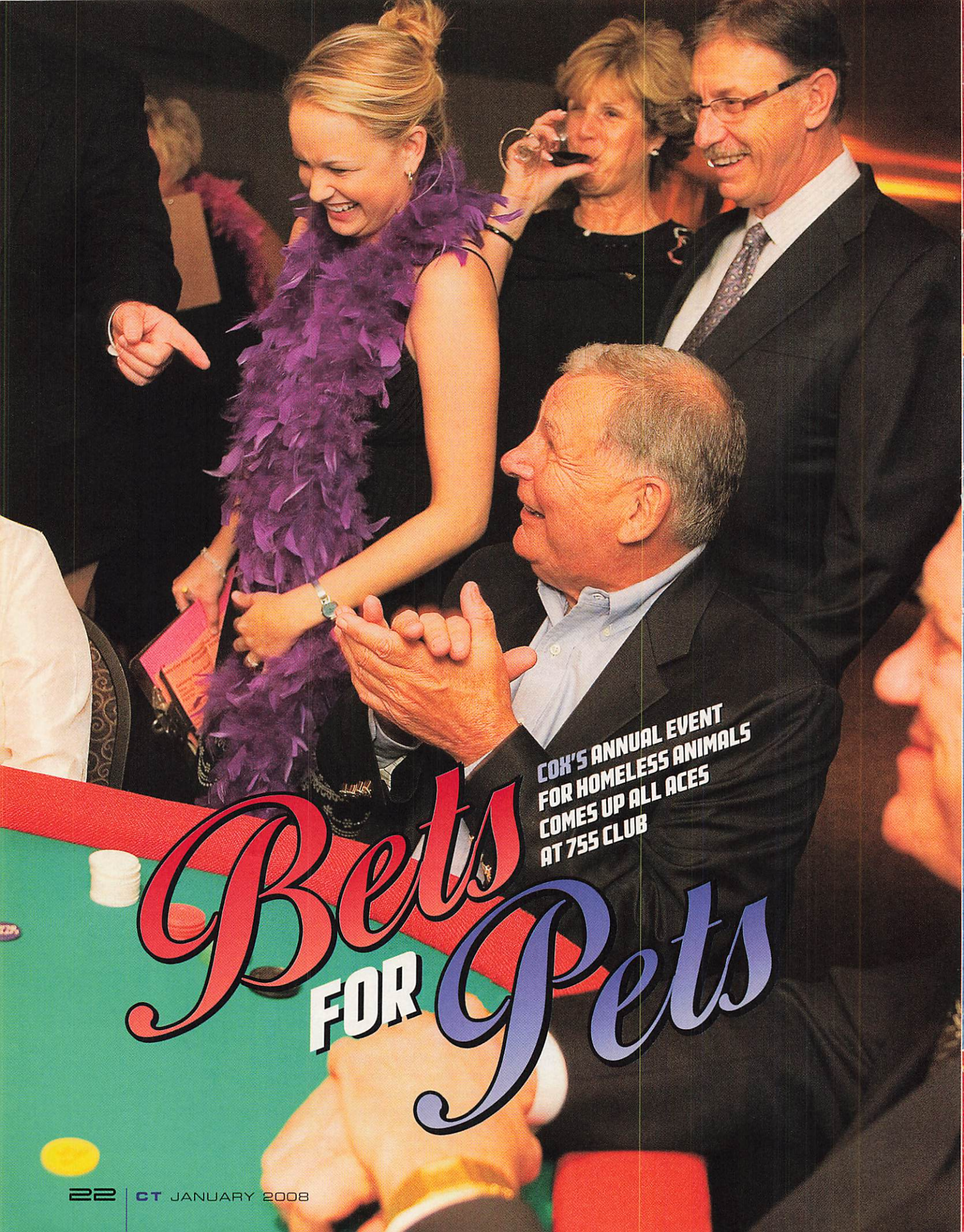
At this point I don't have strong concerns. There are things we just don't know about yet, but we won't know how well (young players) will do until we watch them during training camp and the spring training games.

Yunel Escobar is an excellent replacement for losing Edgar. Escobar did a fine job of hitting leadoff for us last year, but so did Kelly Johnson. I think both guys are capable of filling that spot. There's a lot of wait-and-see type speculation that goes on this early, but we feel very comfortable with them hitting high in the order.

That said, we'll also look at other young guys. Brandon Jones hit leadoff in Mexico. We got Omar Infante in the trade that brought Ohman here. He's a strong utility player. Last season he played centerfield, shortstop, second and third base.

In left, we have Matt Diaz who had a good season and Brandon Jones who played well at the end of the season and then went on to play very well in Mexico. We'll see how (Jones) looks in spring, but we're pretty hopeful that he could be a piece of our team. Having Mark Teixeira playing first for us and in our lineup from the start of the season is probably the biggest difference. But nothing is bigger than having good, deep pitching.

Overall I like what we've done to help ourselves. Frank's worked really hard and found some great pieces to fit into the puzzle. I absolutely think this team is strong enough to win the division. If everything works right, we'll be right in the thick of it.



Bets for Pets

COX'S ANNUAL EVENT FOR HOMELESS ANIMALS COMES UP ALL ACES AT 755 CLUB

BY JAY BUSBEE PHOTOS BY ALLISON SHIRREFFS

IT'S A RARE CELEBRATION when the guests of honor don't attend, and it's even rarer that the guests wouldn't be allowed in the door if they did show up.

Braves players and fans gathered in Turner Field's 755 Club Nov. 17 for a night of dining, dancing and casino games to benefit homeless pets in Atlanta. The "Paws Because" fundraiser - a project of Bobby Cox, his wife Pam, and daughter Skyla - is quickly becoming a must-attend for charity-minded Braves fans.

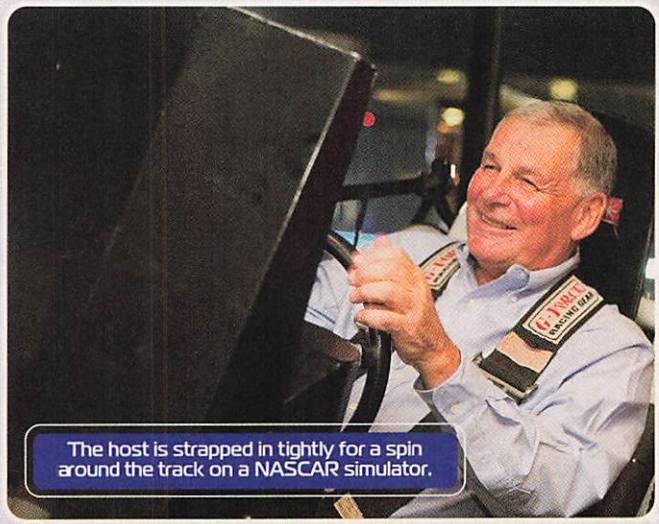
Guests at this year's event, dubbed "Bets for Pets," enjoyed memorable moments like the opportunity to face off against Braves players at the casino table. The silent and live auctions included everything from signed balls and jerseys to big-ticket items such as a Colorado big-game hunting expedition and a chance to co-manage a spring training game with Cox himself. The "manager for a day" gig went to an Atlanta doctor, who asked to remain anonymous, for $11,000.

The Cox family took up the cause of homeless pets after their dog, a Shih Tzu named Rosa, had a midnight medical emergency six years ago. The veterinarian who treated Rosa, Dr. Michael Good, happened to be the founder of the Homeless Pets Foundation, and told the Coxes about the staggering scope of the homeless animal problem in Atlanta. More than 100,000 animals are euthanized annually in the metro Atlanta area, and when Good asked the Coxes to get involved, they agreed immediately.

In 2005, the Coxes opened the doors to their Adairsville home for the first annual "Bobby Cox Paws Because" fundraiser. To accommodate a larger crowd, the 2006 event took place at Barnsley Gardens Resort. There wasn't much room to move in the 755 Club, and guests stood two and three deep at the tables and gaming stations - particularly when some of the celebrities in attendance started playing.

Over 500 people attended, and more than $62,000 was raised, according to the Paws Because staff.

Guests at the event could purchase tickets to "challenge" a celebrity to a casino game. In addition to Cox, the most popular "challengee" was Jeff Francoeur, just back from his honeymoon. Francoeur showed some skill at the Texas Hold 'Em table, while Cox threw his chips on the table for a few hands of blackjack.



The host is strapped in tightly for a spin around the track on a NASCAR simulator.

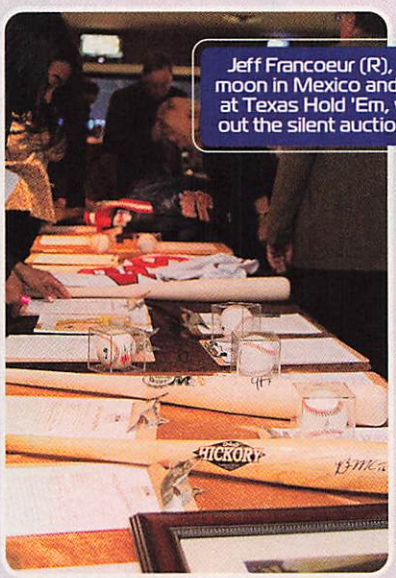
Other familiar faces included Brian McCann and Kelly Johnson, as well as former Braves second baseman Mark Lemke. Also among the Braves players was Tom Glavine, whose presence stirred up plenty of conversation since, on this night, Glavine was a free agent who was still two days away from announcing his return to Atlanta.

The players seemed to enjoy the chance to visit the ballpark without the pressure of having to perform on the field.

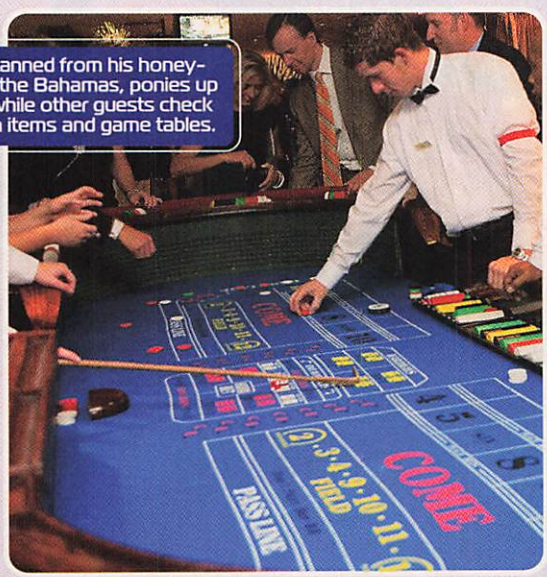
"The off-season can get a little quiet," Francoeur said. "Sometimes you don't get to see these [teammates] as much as you'd like. It's also for a good cause, and it's Bobby. So it's a great event."

The pets that stood to benefit most from the evening were present in image only. A slide show of dogs and cats was shown on the 755 Club's televisions, and judging from the appreciative "awww"s from the audience, it's a good bet a few of them found new homes in the days after the event. And it's a sure bet that the attendees at this year's event are already making plans for 2008.

For more information on the Homeless Pets Foundation, visit homelesspets.com.



Jeff Francoeur (R), tanned from his honeymoon in Mexico and the Bahamas, ponies up at Texas Hold 'Em, while other guests check out the silent auction items and game tables.



MANAGERIAL SEMINAR

EDDIE PEREZ PURSING LONG-RANGE GOAL BY COACHING IN HIS HOMELAND OF VENEZUELA

BY JOSÉ OROZCO

WHEN A YOUNG EDUARDO PEREZ traveled from Venezuela to Miami to begin his professional baseball career in 1987, no one from the Braves showed up to take him to his Fort Lauderdale hotel. Twelve hours later, the 18-year-old Braves catching prospect, speaking no English, gave up and found a cab.

That incident taught Eddie Perez, as Braves fans know him, that the road to baseball success would be littered with obstacles.

But the hurdles have only made Perez's success all the sweeter.

Sitting in a lounge at Luis Aparicio Stadium in Maracaibo, Venezuela, where the Braves bullpen coach is spending the major league off-season as a coach for the Zulia Eagles (Aguilas)of the Venezuelan Winter League, Perez speaks of a life and career marked by family and friends, as well as by tough choices.

"I like sacrifices," explained Perez, 39, who played 20 years in pro ball, 18 of those in the Braves organization, "because I know I'm going to do well. I don't like things that come easily."

Braves bullpen coach Eddie Perez scans Luis Aparicio Stadim in Maracaibo, Venezuela, prior to a winter league game where he's coaching for the Zulia Aguilas (Eagles).

JOSE OROZCO

After nine long seasons in the Atlanta farm system (1987-95), Perez reached the big league club, where he played a total of nine seasons, mostly as a backup to Javy Lopez. When Lopez injured his knee in 1999, Perez took over behind the plate, batting .500 (10-for-20) in the NLCS against the Mets and being named series MVP.

Along with the NCLS honor, Perez is perhaps best known as the "personal catcher" for Greg Maddux, who taught him plenty about pitching smart. Perez also learned enough from Bobby Cox and other mentors along the way that the Braves named him to the big league coaching staff a year ago when he retired from playing with a .253 career average in 11 big league seasons.

"God put the Braves on my path," said Perez. "They taught me everything. They taught me to be a good citizen and a good player. My home is there. My family is there. That's where I want to die."

From the missed airport pickup to the time away from his parents and four brothers, and later away from his wife, Marisol, and two children (daughter Maried and son Andres), Perez has sacrificed family life for career. But as his feelings for the team show, Perez wants to repay the Braves for all that they have given him. He wants to keep working for Atlanta as long as possible.

"I want always to be with the Braves," said Perez. "My dream is to be the Braves manager."

That's why he is spending the winter back in his home state of Zulia with the Eagles team instead of with his family in the Atlanta suburb of Duluth. Perez is studying to be a major league manager. So, when he's not coaching for the Braves, he's coaching in Venezuela. Soon, Perez may even manage the Zulia Eagles.

He's almost there.

"I'm ready to manage in Venezuela," Perez said. "But I don't want to. I need to learn. I want to have my people with me."

Perez's friends, and potential coaches, include fellow Venezuelans Omar Vizquel and Andres "Big Cat" Galarraga. He says even Roger McDowell, the Braves pitching coach, has expressed an interest in helping him for a spell. In the meantime, the manager-in-training is learning the ropes in hot and humid Maracaibo.

A student of Bobby Cox, who he sees in fatherly terms, Perez boasts of an elite education.

"For me, he's the best manager," he said.

Instead of harsh words and a strict demeanor, Cox wins over his players by treating them as equals, according to Perez. Rather than controlling, Cox lets his players have fun to bring out the best in them.

"He's a friend, a tremendous person," said Perez. "That's what being a good manager is. Everyone wants to play well for him."

A manager needs a lot of mentors along the way. Among his, Perez also counts former Braves minor league manager (and former Dodgers manager) Grady Little and former Atlanta bench coach Pat Corrales (now with Washington). Perez remembers the confidence Little had in him as a young catcher, playing him often and pushing him constantly.

JOSE OROZCO

BENNETT'S BID FOR SPOT IN STARTING ROTATION
PICKING UP STEAM IN VENEZUELA

BY JOSÉ OROZCO

PAST JOHN SMOLTZ, Tim Hudson and Tom Glavine, there figures to be a free-for-all this spring among pitchers trying to win the fourth and fifth spots in the Braves rotation. Based on the way darkhorse candidate Jeff Bennett pitched late last season and this winter in Venezuela, he could find himself right in the middle of the competition.

"My main goal is to be ready for the season in Atlanta," said Bennett before a game at University Stadium in Caracas. "I really feel that being down here is helping me prepare to win that job."

With his primary focus on developing a curveball this winter and on losing weight, Bennett has been outstanding for the La Guaiara Sharks in the Venezuelan Winter League. Through eight starts, he was 3-2 with a 2.31 ERA, allowing just one home run in 39 innings, walking 15 and striking out 20.

His numbers were much more impressive before a rough outing Nov. 28. In his first seven starts, his ERA was 1.25 in 36 innings. That comes on the heels of three solid, late-season outings for Atlanta after spending most of the year in the minors rebounding from elbow surgery in 2006.

A 27-year-old righthander who signed with the Braves as a minor league free agent, Bennett shrugs off his Tommy John surgery, saying he's "totally recovered."

Jeff Bennett had a 1.25 ERA in his first seven starts in Venezuela and also lost 41 pounds.

LA GUAIARA SHARKS

He made his Braves debut in impressive fashion Sept. 20 at Turner Field, giving up just one run in five and two-thirds innings (one walk and eight strikeouts) against Milwaukee. He was credited with the 3-1 victory that kept the Braves' faint playoff hopes alive and helped drive the Brewers to elimination.

Sharks pitching coach Roberto Espinosa likes Bennett's stuff, noting his command of a changeup and a good sinker and slider. Not content with those pitches, however, the Tennessee native is working on a curveball he hasn't thrown in years. It still has a way to go.

"It's not good yet, but I threw it for a strike once and have it where it wouldn't hurt me," said Bennett, originally drafted and signed by Pittsburgh in 1998 (19th round), then taken by Milwaukee in the Rule 5 draft in 2003.

He hopes soon to be able to throw the curve the way he throws the changeup now - anytime.

But Espinosa prefers that Bennett err on the side of caution for a while, throwing the curve only occasionally.

"After not using that pitch for so much time and coming from Tommy John, I just don't want him to get hurt," said Espinosa, who has worked with noted Venezuelan pitchers Freddy Garcia and Johan Santana.

Among Bennett's priorities this winter is getting fit and staying healthy. At Richmond last summer, he weighed 256 pounds, but now he's down to 215. Leaner and lighter, Bennett feels a great deal better.

"I'm more agile on the mound," said Bennett, whose previous big league experience came in 2004 with Milwaukee when he was 1-5 with a 4.79 ERA in 60 appearances, all relief. "I can get to grounders, and I feel good my last inning of the game."

Bennett is being limited to 75 pitches per outing, and that's to be reduced to 60 to help him stay strong for spring training.

Based on his solid pitching and weight loss, Bennett seems to have met his goals for this winter league season. He says his game plan with the Braves is: "Pounding the zone, getting quick outs, and going deep (into games)."

Espinosa praises Bennett's work ethic and heart in fighting back from surgery.

"That type of surgery takes longer," said Espinosa. "Many don't come back. He's pitching more effectively and stronger. There's no doubt with the pitches he's got and the way he's pitching here," said Espinosa, "he's making it."

"You're going to make it to the big leagues," Little would tell Perez.

Among teammates who helped Perez as a player, he qualified Javy Lopez as a "great friend." As catchers on the same team, a rivalry would seem logical. But Lopez and Perez never saw it that way.

"Our friendship helped us both make it to the big leagues and kept us there," said Perez, who claims his compadre is working on a comeback. Lopez may even come down to play for Zulia this winter, according to Perez.

Everyone seems to remember Perez as Maddux's personal catcher. But Perez, known for his quick wit, puts a different spin on their relationship.

"They tell me: 'You were Greg Maddux's catcher.' And I tell them: 'No, he was Eddie Perez's pitcher.'"

Long before conspiring with Maddux, however, Perez first settled into a crouch in the sweltering streets of his hometown, Ciudad Ojeda, less than an hour from Maracaibo. An oil town, Ciudad Ojeda offered stable jobs, a social network and baseball.

It was the kind of industrial town where "the father would retire and the son would take his place," according to Nelson Morillo, 49, Perez's big brother. Their father, Salvador Perez, worked on oil rigs in Lake Maracaibo.

After oil was discovered, U.S oil companies entered the region en masse and profoundly shaped Zulia's society. The Americans introduced their culture, including baseball, into this oil-rich land. Ever since, oil and baseball have been intimately linked in Venezuela. It's no accident, as Perez points out, that the late Luis Aparicio, Venezuela's first major leaguer and a Hall of Famer, was from Zulia.

The oil companies built the stadiums, created the leagues, and sponsored the teams, says Morillo. They even supported parenting groups, some of them meeting at baseball stadiums.

Salvador's oil industry job allowed him, a quality catcher for local amateur clubs, to provide for his large family and devote free time to training his sons. Lila Perez, the matriarch, would prepare sandwiches and arepas, the beloved corn cakes often stuffed with meat or cheese filling, to feed the five hungry boys on game days.

The second youngest of five, little Eduardo strove to compete with his older brothers so they'd let him play. That brotherly challenge spurred his development and helped him rank among the best players in his age group. At 7, his first year of organized baseball, Perez's team went on to the national championships.

Perez's brother, Nelson, still can't get over just how much Eduardo resembled their father behind the plate.

"They were exactly the same," said Morillo. "The way he stood, the way Dad moved, he moved. But he gave it technique."

Indeed, Perez owes everything to his father.

"Thanks to my father, I am where I am today," he said, crediting Salvador Perez with providing good advice and support through the struggle of trying to develop a big league career. "He helped me become who I am."

Today, the managerial hopeful is serious and disciplined and leads an almost boring life in Zulia. Perez shuttles between his hotel and the stadium, scarcely going out with old friends or holding court back in Ciudad Ojeda. It's just not safe.

"You're not free to do as you like," said Perez. "It's very frustrating. I want to be with my family, friends. But you can't. Crime doesn't allow for it."

Maracaibo's huge annual festival, which little Eduardo used to dream of, is off limits. He didn't go this November out of fear. Yet Perez admits he couldn't stay away from the bullfights that are part of the event.

"There was a lot of security," he said, adding that he is a big fan of bullfights.

Confined in Zulia and missing his family in Atlanta, Perez has no regrets about the tough choice he made to coach in Venezuela's Winter League.

"Bobby (Cox) didn't want me to come," Perez said. "But the opportunity is here."

Saying goodbye at the airport to his teary-eyed family, who visited Maracaibo this Thanksgiving break, seemed to capture the emotional strain and brave commitment of Perez to become a major league manager.

"What I most desire is to spend time with them," he said of his family. "I wish I could go, but this is my job. I have to sacrifice to be something in baseball."

BATTER UP!

BLAINE BOYER

I'M HEALTHY AND SET TO START OR RELIEVE

MY SHOULDER IS AS HEALTHY as it's ever been. It might be even better than it's ever been.

The surgery I had (in 2006) didn't mess with the dynamics of my shoulder at all. They didn't put an anchor in there or anything, just cleaned it up.

I'm doing most of my regular shoulder exercises this off-season in order to keep it strong, but I'm putting a lot of stress on my legs, bulking them up and getting them as strong as they can possibly be. Frank Fultz (Braves strength and conditioning coach) gave me some good workouts, and that's what I'm doing.

In pitching, the power comes from your legs. You watch certain guys pitch, like Josh Beckett (Red Sox) and you see that he "falls" into his legs so well. He's got big, strong legs, and he uses the power from his legs and backside to his advantage.

I want to really incorporate my legs into my delivery. I've been watching film this off-season, and it's all going to help me get where I need to be, physically, for next year.

The oblique injury I had last year was weird. I'd never had an oblique issue all my life. I remember it was the last game of spring training, the last pitch of the inning, and I felt a little "pop" in my oblique. I thought, "What was that?"

It didn't hurt immediately, but I told the trainers what I'd felt. By the next morning, I couldn't even bend over to touch my toes. So I'm working on my core this year again, but I've changed the workout a little bit. Physically, I'm in good shape.

I started throwing in mid-December. I'll throw 60 feet, every other day, probably just one set to get my arm going, and slowly work up to full strength. I don't go anywhere special to throw. I just grab a buddy and go to the local school and throw in their field.

> "I REALLY FEEL I CAN BE A LIGHTS-OUT, STRONG PITCHER COMING OUT OF THE BULLPEN."

The early throwing program starts at Turner Field around the first of February, so a group of guys might head down to Turner Field to throw a bit in January. There's really no big rush.

I played at Richmond at the end of the season, and we were playing until almost October because of being in the International League Championship. It's always fun to play on a championship team.

I was a starter there and had some good starts and some really bad starts. But it was a great group of guys to play with, and Guy Hansen is a really good pitching coach.

I don't have a preference as to whether I start or work from the bullpen. I'm being perfectly honest when I say that.

When you hear about the starters in the mix, my name is not usually mentioned, and that's okay. I've always said that I will work in whatever capacity they want me. I really did grow to love the bullpen when I was there in 2005 and 2006. Both roles have their perks, and I'm comfortable either place.

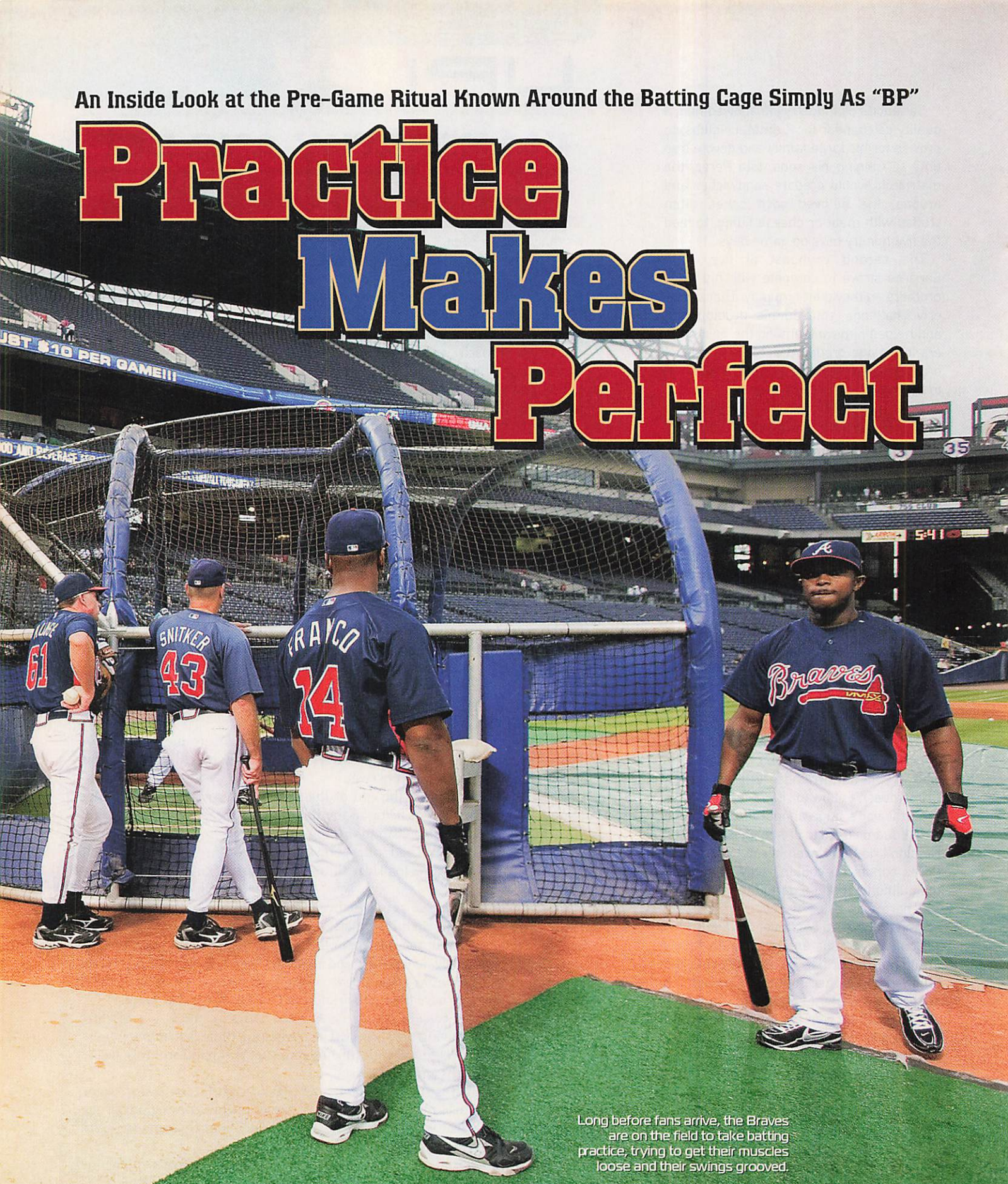
This season was a time of getting back to the basics for me. It was my first year healthy, since having the surgery. The interesting thing is that, pitching as a starter, you get a feel for all your pitches and what you have. So I was always aware of my strengths and weaknesses.

I think the verdict is still out on whether I could start (at the major league level), but I really feel I can be a lights-out, strong pitcher coming out of the bullpen. I believe that was very evident. There were definitely some struggles for me as a starter, but there is potential there.

I just know that putting on that Atlanta Braves jersey means that you're one of the best players in the world, and that's a great feeling.

An Inside Look at the Pre-Game Ritual Known Around the Batting Cage Simply As "BP"

Practice Makes Perfect



Long before fans arrive, the Braves are on the field to take batting practice, trying to get their muscles loose and their swings grooved.

BY JON COOPER PHOTOS BY ALLISON SHIRREFFS

HALL OF FAME LEGEND Ted Williams, the last major leaguer to hit .400 in a season (.406 in 1941), once called hitting a round ball squarely with a round bat the most difficult thing to do in any sport.

Yet the Braves and the other teams in the majors can make it look so easy, doing it against pitchers who mix a variety of 90-plus miles per hour fastballs with changeups, an off-speed pitch that comes out of the fastball motion, and a sharp breaking ball that sometimes needs a tailwind just to reach 70 mph.

Making it look easy requires hours of practice, including the pre-game ritual of batting practice - BP for short - when big leaguers make hitting a baseball look almost like child's play.

BP is a show of its own, well worth early arrival at the ballpark for a unique glimpse at the power and precision of major league hitters. It also can be a good time to chase down balls hit into the seats, since most fans haven't arrived. The Braves usually begin BP 2 hours and 45 minutes prior to game time and don't finish until an hour and a half before game time - when the visiting team starts its BP.

The BP pitchers, usually members of the coaching staff, stand behind an L-shaped, protective screen on a slightly elevated platform approximately 30 feet from home plate. Their proximity to the plate allows their slower tosses to get to the hitters quickly, creating more of a semblance of game conditions.

"We're out here trying to get them situated for the game," said Braves hitting coach Terry Pendleton, himself a former NL batting champion (1991). "There are no goals. Just come out here and get loose and try to figure out what you're doing. You come out here and try to perfect it."

Hitters may look like they've already perfected their craft, but they take the BP routine very seriously.

"It's very important," said Chipper Jones, who as a switch-hitter must be ready to hit from either side of the plate. "Muscle memory is everything in this game. You've got to be able to replicate things and do things over and over and over. BP helps you do that."

"I need to hit from both sides of the plate every day," agreed first baseman Mark Teixeira, who's also a switch-hitter. "I make sure that in batting practice I get plenty of swings from either side. It's mostly just to get loose and make sure that my body's feeling right and my swing is feeling right. Just try to get as many swings in 15 minutes as I can."

Pendleton breaks the team up into five groups of four players and picks the pitchers who will throw to them. Each group takes approximately six rounds of swings. In the first round, players attempt to lay down a bunt, then take six to eight swings and rotate. After that, they take rounds of five swings, four, three and finally two.

How the hitters approach their rounds is up to them, but there is a common method.

"Your first couple of rounds, everything is staying inside the baseball, trying to go the other way (opposite field)," said Jones. "Then as you get loose and the pitcher starts to work you around, you start going up the middle and start to pull balls so that your body gets used to those actions. [The first round] will be going middle away and driving the ball the other way, and then the three middle rounds go up the middle.

"Your last couple can be for the cameras," he added with a smile. "Trying to jack a few balls out so that you don't lose that muscle memory, either."

"When I get to batting practice, my first two rounds I want to hit everything to the right, right field," said leftfielder Matt Diaz. "I want to make sure my hands stay close to my body, and my hands stay inside the ball. Then I just hit it where it's pitched. If I feel like I'm yanking the ball too much to left field, I'll start trying to hit the L-screen (in front of the pitcher) as many times in a row as I can, something like that, play little games with myself."

Similar mind games are played by platoon players or reserves, who use BP to try to simulate game situations.

"It's not easy when you're not seeing pitching to try and go up there and hit [during a game]," said utilityman Chris Woodward, now a free agent. "There's nothing you can really do to simulate hitting off a pitcher, but you try to do the best you can with what you've got. It's difficult at times, but as long as you're up there and you're prepared as much as you can, that's all you can do."

Like anything done on a daily basis, batting practice can become monotonous for the players. It's up to them to come up with ways to keep it interesting.

"Some days I'll work on going to right field, work on basehits. Some days I just try and hit home runs," said Jeff Francoeur with a laugh. "It depends. Kind of however I'm feeling at the plate. I work on hitting to right field or back up the middle, work on hitting it on the ground, if I'm having trouble, just different things. It

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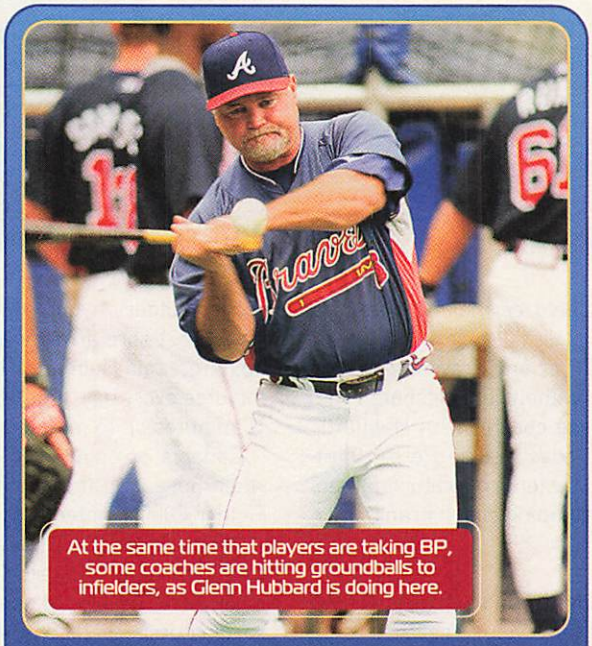
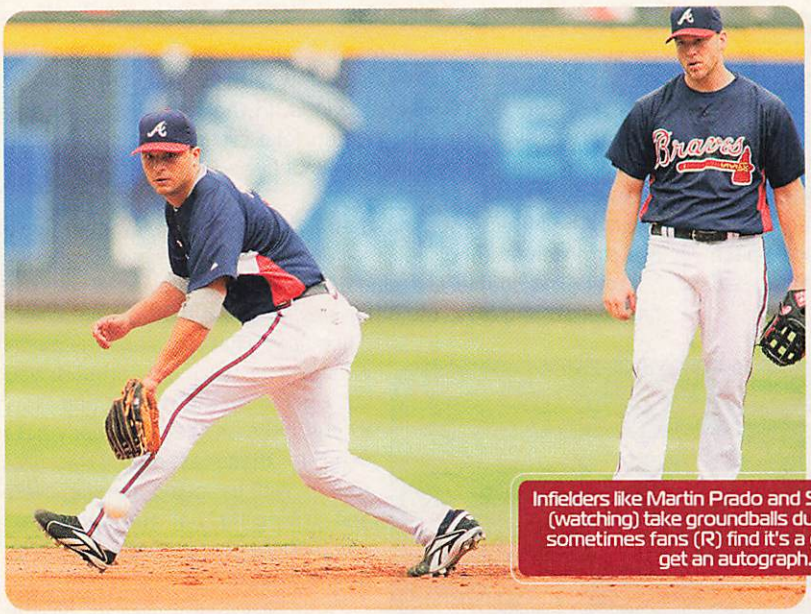


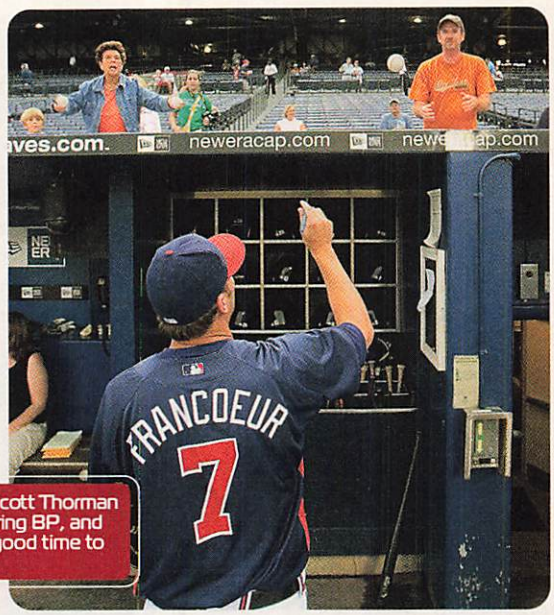
At the same time that players are taking BP, some coaches are hitting groundballs to infielders, as Glenn Hubbard is doing here.

Turner Field BP Schedule*

Game Time	1:05 p.m.	7:05 p.m.	7:35 p.m.
Braves Pitchers	10:20	4:20	4:50
Group I	10:35	4:35	5:05
Group II	10:50	4:50	5:20
Group III	11:05	5:05	5:35
Group IV	11:20	5:20	5:50
Visitors	11:35	5:35	6:05

* 2007 (times subject to change or cancellation at team's discretion)





Infielders like Martin Prado and Scott Thorman (watching) take groundballs during BP, and sometimes fans (R) find it's a good time to get an autograph.

can be anything from going to right field or making sure I'm keeping my elbow up."

It would be impossible for Francoeur or any Braves hitters to work on anything in batting practice without the pitchers. The Braves BP "rotation" features first base coach Glenn Hubbard, bench coach Chino Cadahia, bullpen coach Eddie Perez, third base coach Brian Snitker and baseball systems operator/bullpen catcher Alan Butts. Strength and conditioning coach Frank Fultz serves as the sole lefty.

Their job is a simple one.

"Be able to throw strikes," said Hubbard. "Chino throws it right there, and I throw it right there. You're not trying to get them out. You're just trying to let them hit it as far as they want.

"Sometimes guys want curveballs," he added. "I throw a curveball that's just a change of speeds."

"Most of the hitters like to work the ball the other way early in the batting practice session," added Cadahia, who has been throwing BP for 23 years. "So usually the first round or two you want to throw the ball somewhat middle to away from them so they can work on that. Pretty much after that you try to throw down the middle and let them do whatever they want with it."

Players appreciate the coaches' ability to serve as human pitching machines.

"The golden boys are Chino and Hubby. They're our 1 and 2 guys," said Diaz. "But Alan Butts has really had a fast rise this year. He's the second-half pitcher of the year, probably."

Being machine-like in their accuracy doesn't mean the coaches are immune to the aches and pains that plague all pitchers.

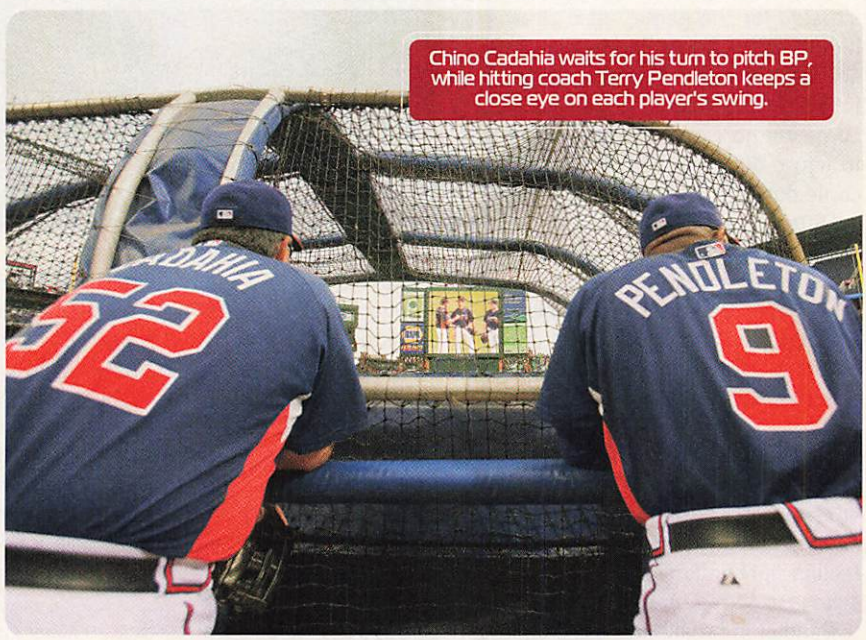
"You don't have the full effort of a pitcher, but after a while, your elbow and your shoulder kind of wear down over the course of a season," said Butts, who has been throwing BP for the Braves since 1992. "So you try and keep them strong. Those are the two things that usually bother you at some point. You get a little tight in your shoulder or your elbow."

"You get sore arms and stuff, but we've got plenty of pitching up here," said Hubbard. "In the minor leagues, you can throw 45 minutes every day. It gets tough down there. Up here, you throw 10 minutes or 15 minutes and that's it."

Cadahia, so adept at BP pitching that he threw to Sammy Sosa when Sosa won the All-Star Game Home Run Derby at Turner Field in 2000, pointed out that Pendleton takes wear into account.

"Terry does a great job with us here as far as giving us days off here and there," he said. "With the schedule, with days off, a lot of times we'll have optional hitting in which everybody will not hit, so, of course, everybody will not throw.

"At the end of the year, after six months, plus spring training, you're a little worn out, but it's something we all enjoy doing, and we take a lot of pride in doing it right," he said. "So we just suck it up and go do it."



Chino Cadahia waits for his turn to pitch BP, while hitting coach Terry Pendleton keeps a close eye on each player's swing.

WHICH WAY TO THE STRIKE ZONE?

AN UNEXPECTED HAZARD for a batting practice pitcher - any pitcher for that matter - is the occasional bout with control. The delay the batter experiences waiting for pitches to hit and the time constraints of batting practice make it particularly frustrating when a BP pitcher experiences a radar malfunction.

"We call it 'getting the monkey,'" Alan Butts, baseball systems operator/bullpen catcher, said with a laugh. "You don't ever want that monkey tapping you on the shoulder. Usually, if you don't find that rhythm, you kind of step off for a second, grab a few balls, take your time, and then hopefully you find it real quick. That happens to everybody a little bit."

Eddie Perez displays the tools of a BP pitcher - a basketful (and handful) of balls and a rubber arm.

Maybe not everybody. Neither Chino Cadahia nor Glenn Hubbard would admit to getting that tap on the shoulder... yet.

"I've been fortunate enough that I've never lost the plate," said Cadahia. "I have bad days like everybody else, but my bad days are not as bad as some other people's I guess."

"Not yet," Hubbard said when he was asked about "getting the monkey." "There are plenty of guys who do. I hope it doesn't happen, because it's a terrible thing to watch."

When the pitcher loses the plate in BP, the hitters will usually try to help him.

"I don't really take many balls in the game, so I don't really take many balls in BP," said Matt Diaz. "They don't want to sit there and take an hour to get through one batter. So the best thing you can do to help him out is to swing. Pretend it's a hit-and-run."

- JON COOPER

MONEY'S NO OBJECT FOR THE "DETROIT YANKEES"

THE TIGERS are throwing around cash like they're the Yankees. Not only did they add nearly $20 million in salary for next season by acquiring **Miguel Cabrera** and **Dontrelle Willis** from Florida, but they also traded two players whom they had signed to huge bonuses out of the draft. Lefthander **Andrew Miller**, their No.-1 pick in 2006, received a $3.55 million bonus. Outfielder **Cameron Maybin**, their first-rounder in '05, signed for $2.65 million. Together, they appeared in 45 games for the Tigers before becoming the bait that enabled the team to spend even more.

It's significant that **Andruw Jones** signed a two-year contract with the Dodgers for $36.2 million rather than $36 million. The extra $200,000 in the deal gives him a higher average annual value than **Torii Hunter** received in his five-year deal with the Angels. Jones, however, came in nearly $90 million below the extension that the Blue Jays awarded centerfielder **Vernon Wells** last off-season and nearly $100 million below the free-agent deal the Cubs gave leftfielder **Alfonso Soriano**.

Don't be surprised if **Torii Hunter** emerges as the most popular sports figure in Los Angeles. **Andruw Jones** isn't nearly as magnetic a figure. The Lakers' **Kobe Bryant** is widely disliked, the region lacks an NFL franchise, and **David Beckham** plays the wrong kind of football to become a major star in the U.S.

The Royals' signing of free-agent outfielder **Jose Guillen** to a three-year, $36 million contract seemed excessive until you compare Guillen's numbers over the past three seasons to **Aaron Rowand**'s. Guillen had a lower on-base percentage, but a higher slugging percentage and more home runs and RBIs in 210 fewer at-bats.

The Phillies, after failing in a late bid to sign **Mike Lowell**, expected to open the season with a **Wes Helms-Greg Dobbs** platoon at third base if they fail to re-sign **Tadahito Iguchi**. Free agent **Pedro Feliz** was another option. He would give the Phillies excellent defense at third, a right-handed bat to help balance their lineup, and power production comparable to Rowand's. His career on-base percentage, however, is .288.

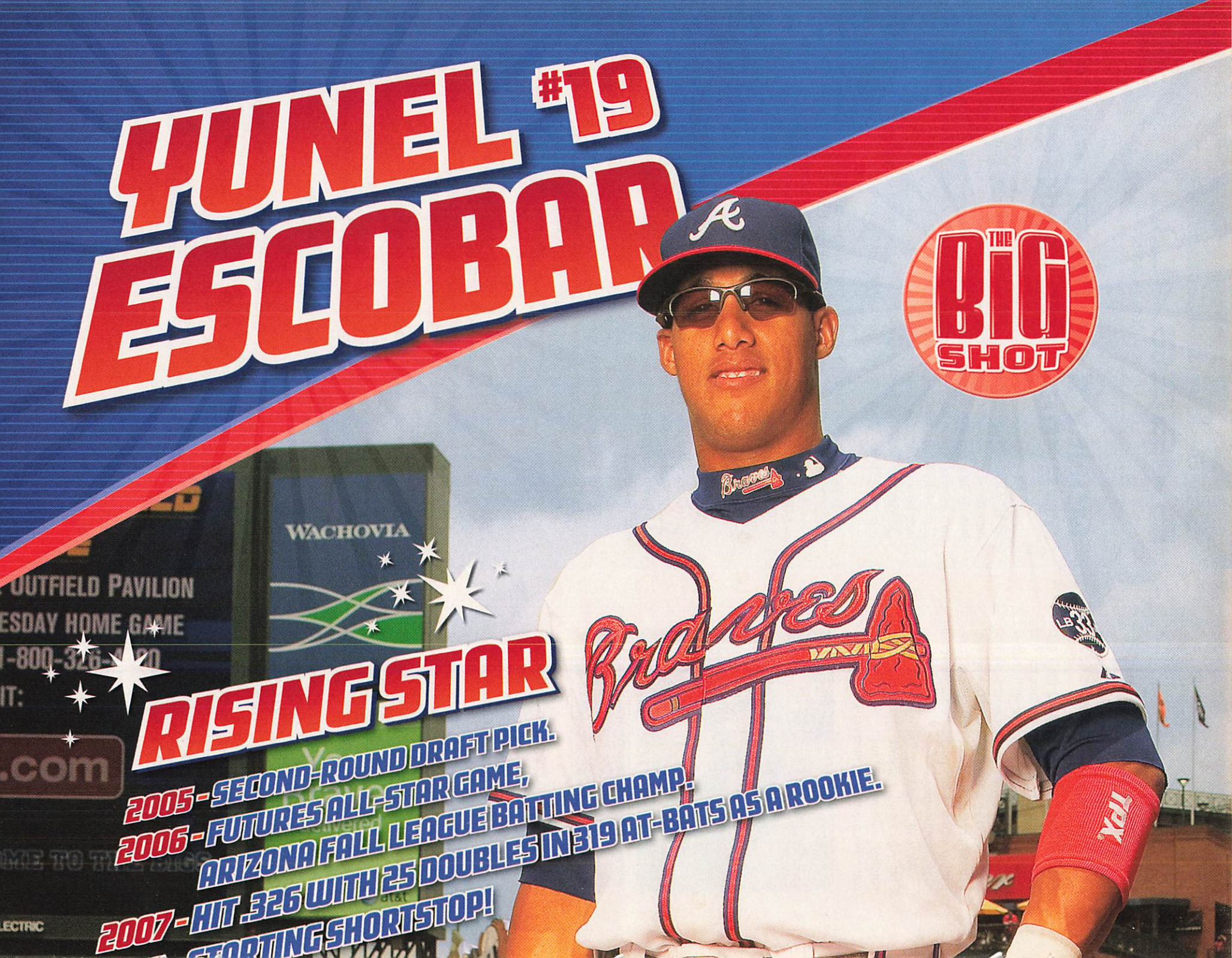
How thin was the free-agent market for left-handed relievers? After the Phillies' signing of **J.C. Romero** to a three-year, $12 million contract, **Jeremy Affeldt** was expected to receive a four-year deal. Affeldt, 28, had a 4.91 ERA prior to last season, and his career on-base percentage allowed is .348.

The Mets passed on Pirates reliever **Salomon Torres**, in part because they believed he was too comfortable playing for a losing team in Pittsburgh. Maybe they were right. Torres threatened to retire upon being traded to the Brewers. The Mets made the strongest run at Rockies lefthanded reliever **Brian Fuentes**, offering righthander **Aaron Heilman** in a straight-up trade. The Rockies asked for lefty **Scott Schoeneweis** in addition to Heilman, and from there, the talks disintegrated.

- KEN ROSENTHAL IS A SENIOR WRITER FOR FOXSPORTS.COM

YUNEL ESCOBAR #19

THE BIG SHOT



RISING STAR

2005 - SECOND-ROUND DRAFT PICK.

2006 - FUTURES ALL-STAR GAME, ARIZONA FALL LEAGUE BATTING CHAMP.

2007 - HIT .326 WITH 25 DOUBLES IN 319 AT-BATS AS A ROOKIE. STARTING SHORTSTOP!

2008-
Phil Niekro
390
TPX
Braves

SERVICE ABOVE SELF

SMOLTZ COMPLETES HUMANITARIAN "TRIPLE PLAY" WITH BRANCH RICKEY AWARD

BY OWEN PERKINS FOR MLB.COM

NEARING THE END OF A CAREER demanding Hall of Fame consideration, John Smoltz remains focused on finishing strong. But as he talked with boys and girls from the Denver Kids program Nov. 17, it was clear that Smoltz has spent his career sharing his strength with those he has the opportunity to help.

Smoltz was in Colorado to accept the 2007 Branch Rickey Award from the Rotary Club of Denver, honoring humanitarians in Major League Baseball who personify the creed of placing "service above self."

The Branch Rickey Award makes for a "triple play" of awards honoring Smoltz for his character, on and off the field. He was the player's choice as the Marvin Miller Man of the Year Award in '02 and '03, and he won baseball's highest honor, the Roberto Clemente Award, in '05.

Smoltz exemplifies the commitment to community that the Rickey Award recognizes. He's a passionate supporter of Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, the Atlanta Community Food Bank, and the Kings Ridge Christian School, which he founded in 2000.

Smoltz returned to the early experiences that helped form his character when he met with about 20 participants in the Denver Kids program that helps students in K-12 from higher-risk environments live productive lives, and when he addressed a packed ballroom at the awards banquet.

"My marinade, or my upbringing, was one of respect and serving others and keeping the family name as pure as you possibly can," Smoltz said of his formative years. "My parents are both hard-working. They love what they do. They're both musicians, so it's kind of ironic. I was going to follow in their footsteps, but they allowed me to pursue my dream."

Smoltz received something of an awakening shortly after signing his first professional contract with the Detroit Tigers in 1986. Before he ever took the field for the Class A Lakeland Tigers in the Florida State League, he participated in a local telethon in his hometown of Lansing, Mich., raising awareness for the Lansing Food Bank.

"At that point I was kind of naive," Smoltz recalled. "I didn't realize that many people were going hungry. My eyes started to open to some of the different things that were actually out there. This was just the first opportunity I'd had, at 18 years old, to be part of something."

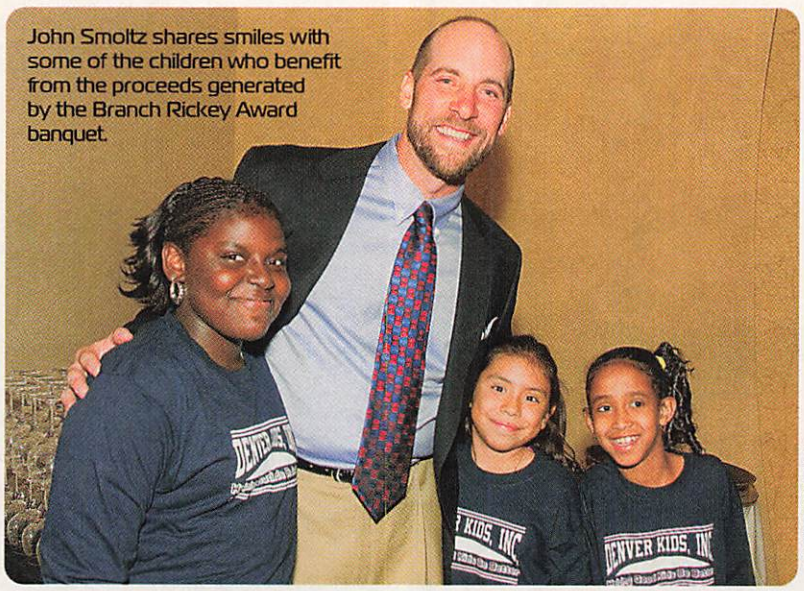
That experience led to his long involvement with the Atlanta Community Food Bank, hosting "Strike Out Hunger" food drives at Turner Field each season and raising over $350,000 and over 80,000 pounds of food to help Atlanta's less fortunate.

Midway through his second minor league season, Smoltz was traded to the Braves. Long before the glory years, he found his consciousness expanding again on his first "Braves Caravan," spending time in January visiting cities throughout the South and making his first hospital visits.

"I did not want to go," he said of those first goodwill trips to visit ailing children. "I did not want to see people hurting, sick, people with cancer. I just felt very uncomfortable. But when I went, it was the greatest experience of my life. I had a feeling of the smiles it was putting on the families, the energy it was giving the sick child."

Smoltz has been a regular visitor at Children's Healthcare ever since, usually making his trips without cameras or media coverage. On a more public front, he hosts the annual John Smoltz Celebrity Pro-AM Golf Tournament, which has raised over $1 million for Children's Healthcare over the past 14 years.

The biggest change in Smoltz's life may have come years later with the founding of Kings Ridge Christian School.



John Smoltz shares smiles with some of the children who benefit from the proceeds generated by the Branch Rickey Award banquet.

ROTARY CLUB OF DENVER

"I wanted to see kids have the best chance to fight for themselves with weapons of knowledge and sports and arts and all the different things," Smoltz said. "In 2000, I guess I had a wild idea to start a Christian school. That's been unbelievable. What I like about it is I'll never get to see the fruits of it. It'll last the test of time. It'll be multiplied generations over."

Perhaps more than any other project, the school has given Smoltz the chance to be a "pioneer," taking the mantle from the late Branch Rickey. Best remembered for working with Jackie Robinson to break baseball's color barrier, Rickey was also an innovator in the game, developing the first farm systems while with the Cardinals and the first spring training facilities while with the Dodgers. His accomplishments earned him the distinction of the "No. 1 Most Influential Person in Sports in the 20th Century," an honor given him by ESPN SportsCentury.

"He was a pioneer who stuck his neck out and did something that the world wasn't ready for," Smoltz said of Rickey, a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. "He forever changed the culture of baseball and life."

EXAMINING GLAVINE'S WINNING FORMULA

BY STEVE FALL

TOM GLAVINE AVERAGED 16 WINS and a 3.34 ERA in his 15 full seasons in Atlanta (1988-2002). The Braves would settle for anything close to that in 2008.

Every year becomes more of a challenge for Glavine. Few pitchers have enjoyed success at age 42, which he'll turn this March. Only 12 pitchers have reached 10 victories in their age-42 season (based on a player's age on June 30). Can Glavine join them and deliver another solid season for Bobby Cox?

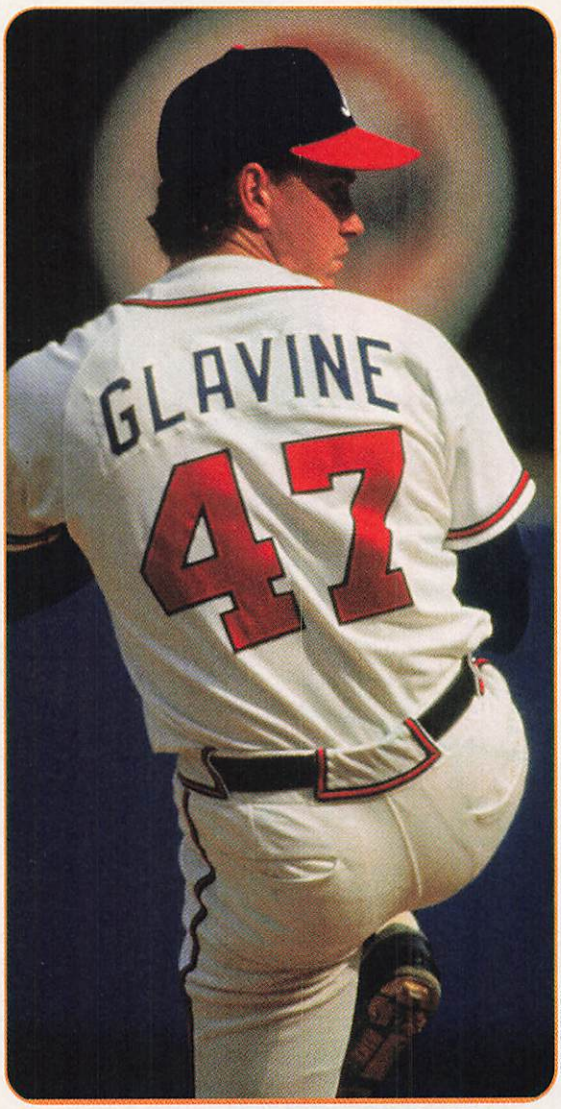
Durability has never been a problem. Glavine became the 14th 41-year-old pitcher to work 200 innings last season. Of the previous 13, six of them – Cy Young, Warren Spahn, Randy Johnson, Nolan Ryan, Roger Clemens and Jamie Moyer – made it to that level as 42-year-olds. Nine of the 13 worked at least 150 innings.

Glavine seems like a good bet to join them. He now has pitched at least 165 innings for 20 successive seasons. In major league history, only former Brave Greg Maddux can match that feat. Young (1891-1909) and Spahn (1947-65) come next with 19 apiece. Among active pitchers, only Livan Hernandez has managed half of Glavine and Maddux's total with 10 seasons.

Delivering quality, in addition to quantity, is the main challenge Glavine faces entering 2008. Although he had 23 quality starts last season, his numbers dipped in several key areas. His ERA rose .63 runs from 2006, but his 4.45 figure still nearly matched the National League average (4.43).

Glavine's 13 wins last season again put him in limited company among 41-year-olds. Another 13-pitcher group, which included many of the same names, took the mound in their age-42 season after winning at least 13 games the previous year. Four of them repeated as 13-game winners. Young (19 wins), Johnson (17) and Clemens (13) joined Spahn (23), the oldest pitcher to win 20 games. Don Sutton (11) and Jack Quinn (10) were the only others to reach double figures in victories, though Phil Niekro (7) may have joined them if not for a strike that shortened the 1981 season.

Since he rarely strikes out batters, Glavine now needs more help from his fielders than most pitchers to win games. His strikeouts per nine innings figure dipped to 4.0 last year. Only two active pitchers besides Glavine – Chien-Ming Wang and Carlos Silva – have won 13 games while striking out so few batters.



ATLANTA BRAVES

Glavine has pitched at least 165 innings for 20 consecutive seasons, a major league record he shares with Greg Maddux.

According to the Bill James Handbook, Glavine averaged the fourth-slowest fastball in the major leagues last year (83.7 mph). That leaves little margin for error. Opponents batted over .300 against him in both August and September.

Glavine has faced these same limitations for years and still succeeded. Top pitchers normally strike out about three batters for every walk they issue. Glavine has a mediocre 1.76 career strikeout-to-walk ratio. Among other active pitchers that have a figure below two, only Kenny Rogers (210) and knuckleballer Tim Wakefield (168) have eclipsed half of Glavine's 303 career victories total.

Glavine has surrendered over 12 baserunners per nine innings since 2000, while striking out less than five per nine innings. Yet he still has an impressive 3.70 ERA in that time frame. Among starters who allow that many runners and strike out hitters as often, nobody approaches his ERA figure. Silva comes next with a distant 4.31 ERA.

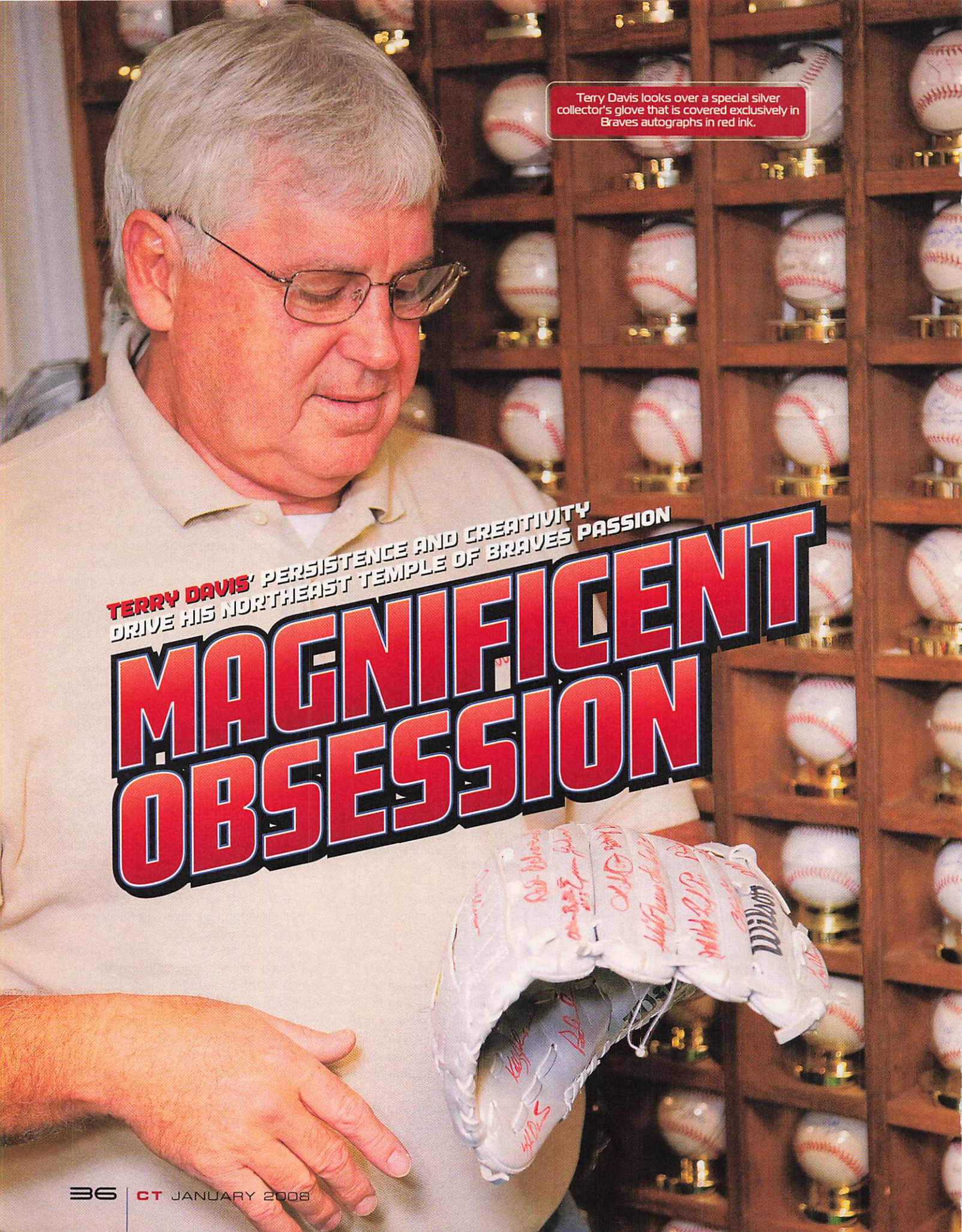
When most pitchers follow this pattern, they pitch their way out of the majors. Glavine, on the other hand, has won more games than all but three other lefthanders in history (Spahn, Steve Carlton and Eddie Plank).

How can Glavine excel in a way that none of his contemporaries can? He grabs seemingly small advantages wherever possible. Only five of 13 basestealers succeeded against him last season. That gave him the NL's second-best caught stealing percentage, even though Mets catchers had problems thwarting stolen base attempts.

Glavine has thrown just four wild pitches in four years. He hasn't balked since 1994. Only four active pitchers (with at least 1,000 career innings) have given up fewer home runs per nine innings.

The two-time Cy Young Award winner has twice pitched over 200 innings in a season without hitting a single batter. No other active pitcher can match that claim. At the plate, he's the only active pitcher with at least 85 career RBIs and 85 runs scored.

None of these things by themselves make a pitcher a winner. But when combined, they have a huge impact. In 2008, Braves fans will discover how much they matter.



Terry Davis looks over a special silver collector's glove that is covered exclusively in Braves autographs in red ink.

TERRY DAVIS' PERSISTENCE AND CREATIVITY DRIVE HIS NORTHEAST TEMPLE OF BRAVES PASSION

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

BY STEVE FALL

THE INSPIRATION for Terry Davis' memorabilia collection came at a baseball fantasy camp. That makes sense, because something about his basement "museum" just doesn't seem real.

A painted scoreboard covers the staircase wall, showing the linescore from Game 6 of the 1995 World Series. Astroturf-style carpeting covers the floor. Two rows of four seats apiece from Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium face the television.

In the center of the room, a mannequin wears a full Braves uniform covered with player signatures. Davis doesn't spare any details. The mannequin comes complete with a glove, wristbands, stirrup socks, and even chewing tobacco in his back pocket.

Balls, bats, photos, uniforms, helmets, gloves and magazine covers (including ChopTalk) fill the room. Many have signatures from the greatest players ever to wear Braves uniforms.

The basement's location makes it even more unusual: Davis lives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Among his hundreds of sports collectibles, Davis treasures his Braves memorabilia the most. He devotes one entire wall to Hall of Famers Hank Aaron, Warren Spahn and Eddie Mathews. It's covered with signed uniforms, photos and bats from the three legends.

A row of more than 50 signed bats lines another wall. Davis displays his most prized baseballs in a wooden case. It holds 91 balls, of which 80 have signatures from Hall of Famers. The other 11 played for either the Braves' 1957 or 1995 World Championship teams. Even the basement's bathroom wall features nine signed balls from current Braves - arranged by position.

It's an incredibly unique and impressive display of Braves memorabilia, to say the least.

Davis, the director of adult probation and parole for Dauphin County, described how his hobby started when he attended the Braves' 1990 fantasy camp in West Palm Beach, Fla.

"I was just going around and getting players' autographs on baseballs," he said. "At the end of that camp, I realized that I should have been getting baseball *bats* signed. So, I went back in 1992, and then I started collecting baseball bats. Then I thought that was stupid because I should be getting *jerseys* signed. So, I went back to other camps and started getting jerseys signed."

It didn't end there. In fact, Davis was only getting started.

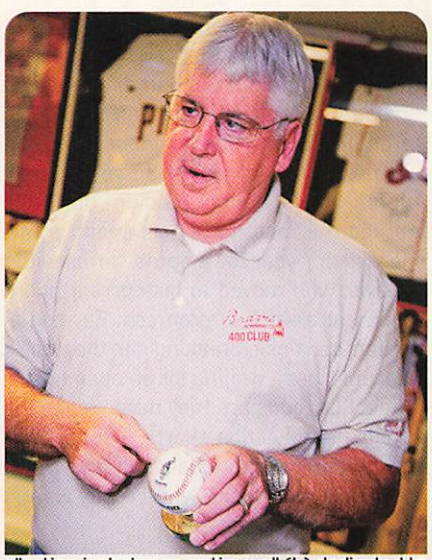
"It just got crazier and crazier," he said. "I like to describe it as an addiction. Because once you start collecting, it's something you do."

Davis' motivation has nothing to do with money. He has never sold a single collectible. When he gets more than one item signed, he sets aside the duplicates for charity. By donating to auctions held for various causes, he has raised $250,000 in the past 10 years. He sets a goal of $25,000 each year.

"I give a lot of stuff to charity," said Davis, who places only one restriction on his donations. "I don't give away many Braves things."

Although he grew up in Harrisburg, Davis became a Milwaukee Braves fan at age six, largely because he liked their uniforms. He later attended Penn State University, served in the military, and returned to his hometown after earning his masters degree in criminal justice.

STEVE FALL



FRANK E. KING PHOTOGRAPHY

Davis' collection includes an entire wall (L) dedicated to Warren Spahn, Hank Aaron and Eddie Mathews, as well as the ball he's holding from the 2000 Olympics, where he headed security at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium.

"This is my museum," said Davis, as he looked around the approximately 20-by-30-foot room. "I'm a diehard Braves fan. But I collect a lot of things that aren't just from Braves, like Hall of Fame guys. I try to find unique stuff. I don't even take baseballs with me anymore, because I'm more interested in getting unusual things signed."

Those unusual items include a chest protector – which he displays over a stool – signed by all four living Hall of Fame catchers (Carlton Fisk, Yogi Berra, Gary Carter and Johnny Bench). Among his other rarities are the original sign for the Braves Museum & Hall of Fame that hung at Turner Field, a Hank Aaron Wheaties box, and dirt from the pitcher's mound at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium. He has a copy of the first Sports Illustrated issue ever from August 1954 with Eddie Mathews on the cover. He even has a rosin bag from the Turner Field dugout.

"There's so much stuff in here that is just so different. I would hate to lose any of it," said the 57-year-old Davis. "There are very

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

FRANK E. KING PHOTOGRAPHY

FRANK E. KING PHOTOGRAPHY

Davis' mannequin is game ready and autographed, too, and his stairway wall offers a unique tribute to the 1995 World Championship.

few things in the room that I would want to part with."

These are more than souvenirs for Davis. They bring back memories from special games. He holds a ball he grabbed during batting practice before Aaron's last game as a Brave in 1974. Aaron hit his final home run for the club (No. 733) in that game.

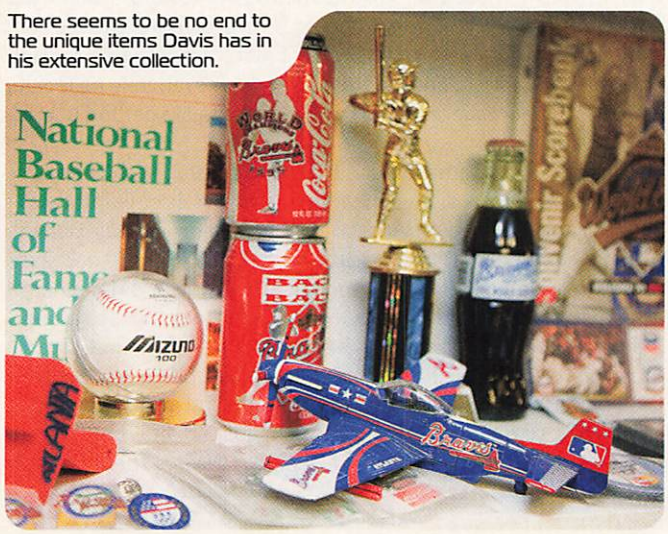
A probation officer for 35 years, Davis managed security at Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium during the 1996 Olympics. That marked the most time he's spent in Atlanta, though he makes one visit per year for a home series with his wife, Marcia.

Davis, who moved to his current home in 2002, considers the basement a work in progress. Earning a spot in his museum is similar to a rookie breaking into the majors. Some items stay in an adjacent closet, waiting for an opening. Unless they have a Braves connection, odds are they never reach the main room. Davis now targets his collection efforts, focusing on select players.

"I no longer take a baseball and get just anybody to sign it. It needs to be someone who I really want, or a player who's going to be in the Hall of Fame."

How does he do it?

Davis believes persistence holds the key. He also makes connections at fantasy camps and other events that help him land collectibles. Friendships with former major leaguers such as Hall of Famer Ferguson Jenkins, Mudcat Grant and Jay Johnstone, have enabled him to connect with other ballplayers.



There seems to be no end to the unique items Davis has in his extensive collection.

At the 50-year reunion for the 1957 Braves this past summer in Milwaukee, he gave out large Hershey chocolate bars to help make an impression. Although he rarely resorts to such tactics, Davis finds ways to stand out and get remembered.

Davis estimates he spends $5,000 to $8,000 each year to find memorabilia, travel to events, and purchase the items to get signed. He attends the Braves 400 Club banquets and the team's annual Hall of Fame Luncheon, as well as golf tournaments that have baseball players participating. He also attends the Hall of Fame induction ceremony and related parties/events each year in Cooperstown.

Despite his enormous collection, Davis still longs for some elusive items and autographs. He's yet to get Sid Bream to sign a photograph of his famous slide to win the 1992 NLCS.

"I have every newspaper article from the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that had Sid's picture all over it, but I can't get where he is to have it signed!" he said.

Davis has an unsigned photo of Bream's slide on his "great moments in baseball" wall. It also celebrates Aaron's 715th home run, Roger Maris' 61st homer, and Bill Mazeroski's walk-off home run to win the 1960 World Series for Pittsburgh.

While the vast majority of his collection is baseball-related, Davis has collectibles from tennis, basketball, hockey and football, as well. He even has a boxing glove signed by Clint Eastwood, Hilary Swank and Morgan Freeman of the movie Million Dollar Baby.

Always looking for something new, Davis started creating his own memorabilia. He gets printed copies of Hall of Fame induction speeches – such as Phil Niekro's in 1997 – and has them signed and framed. The Hall of Famers themselves have reacted with surprise at the speeches, saying that they'd never seen anything like it. All it took was a contact at the Hall of Fame, the persistence to get them signed, and creativity.

When Davis speaks about the future of his collection, he knows one thing for sure.

"As long as I'm collecting, I'll never sell anything," he said. "I'm not saying that some day down the road this stuff won't get sold. My plan is to give it to my grandchildren and say, 'You keep it, but you can't sell it as long as Grandpa is alive.'"

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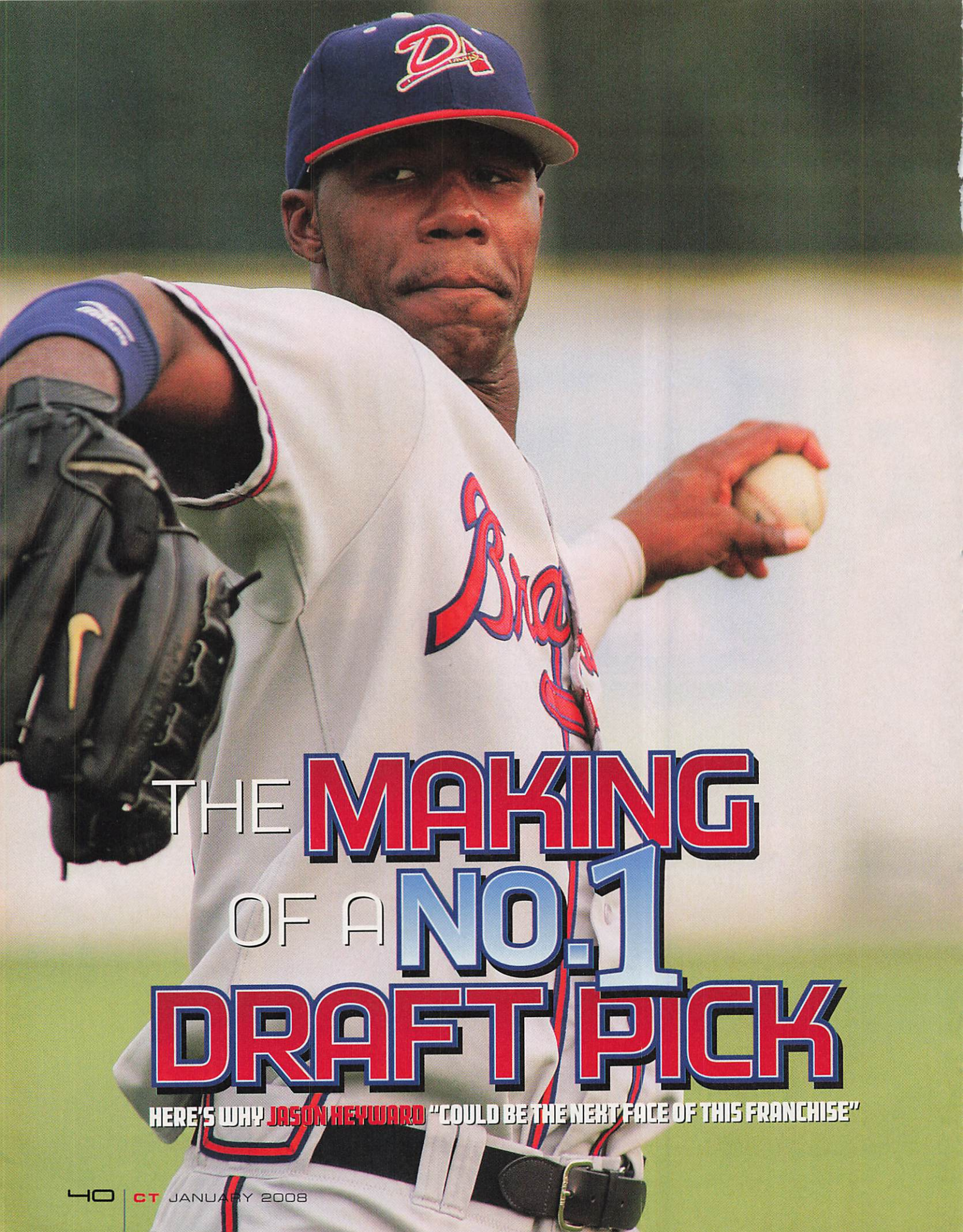


THE MAKING OF A NO. 1 DRAFT PICK

HERE'S WHY JASON HEYWARD "COULD BE THE NEXT FACE OF THIS FRANCHISE"

BY BRIAN KNAPP

THE REPEATED CRACKS of a wooden bat echoed through the thick summer air at Henry County High School. Sweat-stained construction workers, charged with refurbishing the school's softball facility, broke from their routine to watch Jason Heyward hit baseballs. He sprayed the field with one line drive after another, much to the dismay of the project foreman on site.

"He called the principal and complained," said Braves scout Brian Bridges, the man serving batting practice that particular day. "The principal came out, looked at Jason and said, 'I didn't come out here to get on you. I came out here to get you to sign some balls.'"

That was a smart move by the principal, if you ask Roy Clark, the Braves' scouting director. Because when Clark was asked his first impressions of Heyward, he said, "I thought he could be the next face of this franchise.

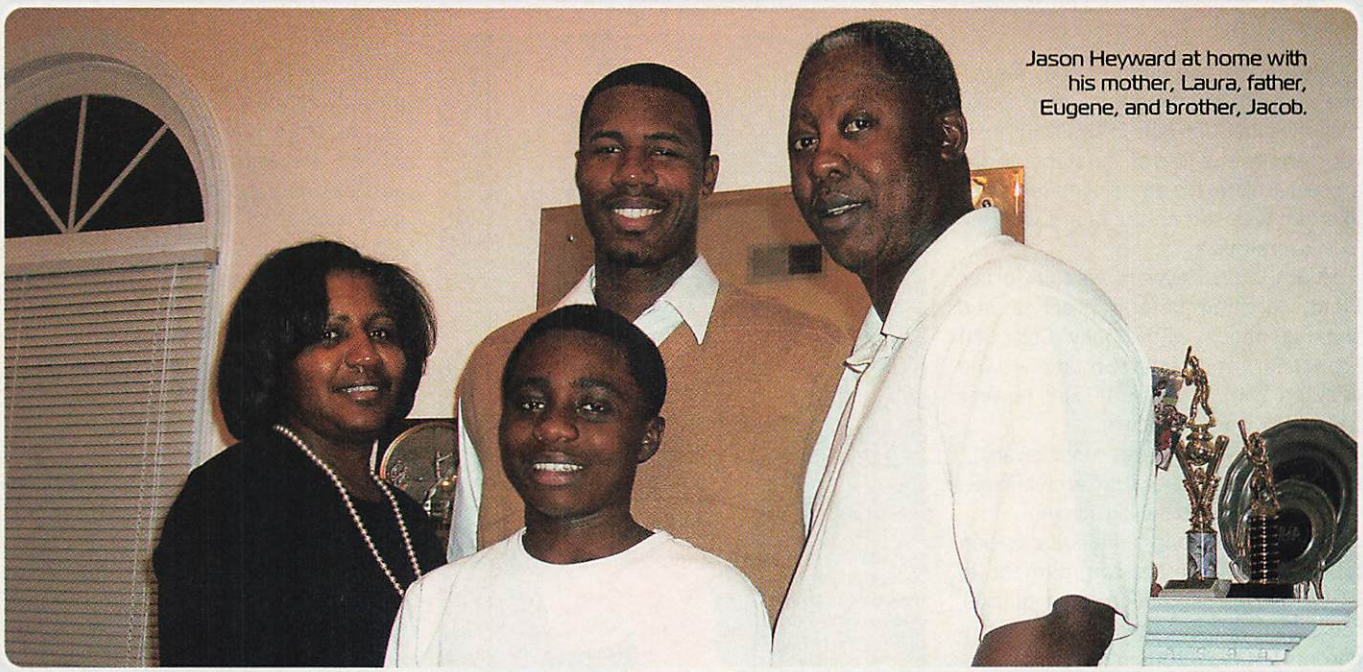
son came to an end against the Twins in the World Series. By age 10, he was telling his parents he wanted to play professional baseball.

"A lot of kids say that," said his mother, Laura, a quality control analyst. "By the time they're 12, they want to do something different. It never changed with him."

Between eighth and ninth grades, Heyward grew seven inches – from an average 5-foot-7 teenager to a 6-foot-1 man-child. He was identified as a potential prospect by several major league clubs, the Marlins and Braves included.

"He was a stringy first baseman," Bridges said. "I watched him grow and mature. It was a four-year process."

Heyward helped guide Henry County High School to its first state championship as a sophomore in 2005. He hit .371 with six home runs and 44 runs batted in. A year later, having grown into his body, he became a high school All-American when his aver-



Jason Heyward at home with his mother, Laura, father, Eugene, and brother, Jacob.

BRIAN KNAPP

"He's the total package, on and off the field - great kid, excellent family. We thought he might have the highest ceiling of any position player in the draft," added Clark about Atlanta's No.-1 draft pick in last June's draft.

No one in the Braves organization knows Heyward quite like Bridges, though. When he was a scout for the Florida Marlins in 2004, Bridges began tracking the progress of the now 6-foot-5, 230-pound outfielder when Heyward was entering his freshman year in high school.

"In eight years, not one kid I've scouted wants it as much as he does," Bridges said. "The kid sets goals for himself, and he will not let anything get in his way. The best thing he's got going for him is the head on his shoulders."

Drive and determination are rooted in Heyward's upper middle class background. The oldest son of Dartmouth College graduates Eugene and Laura Heyward, he was born in Bridgewood, N.J. The family moved to the Atlanta suburb of McDonough in November 1991, mere weeks after Atlanta's "Worst To First" season spiked past the .450 mark. Scouts came by the dozens.

"One day, when I got out of school, I looked out at the parking lot, and every spot was full," Heyward said. "Our parking lot had never been full. I was overwhelmed."

As a senior, he did not disappoint. Despite being pitched around with regularity, Heyward batted .520 with eight home runs and 29 RBIs. A 3.0 student, he committed to attend and play baseball at UCLA, where his uncle (Kenny Washington) played on the legendary John Wooden's first two national championship teams (1964-65) and is a member of the school's athletic hall of fame. As products of an Ivy League school, his parents were ecstatic.

"The day he got into UCLA – that was our greatest excitement," said Heyward's father, Eugene, an engineer. "We were already floating."

Then came June and the 2007 draft, which was to be televised for the first time in history. Heyward gathered family, friends,

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

teammates and former coaches at his home and waited for his name to be called. He was projected to go as high as sixth in the first round to the Washington Nationals, but as the top 10 picks came and went, Eugene grew antsy. Scheduled to choose 12th, the Marlins had shown interest. Meanwhile, the hometown Braves were poised to select the 17-year-old at number 14, the earliest the team had chosen in 16 years. The drama deepened.

"I was more nervous about the Marlins picking him," his father said. "The Braves kept saying they wanted him."

Florida and Cleveland both passed on the power-hitting prospect, opening the door for the Braves to select what some considered the top position player in the draft. Heyward listened as his name was called live on ESPN2, and the Braves had their man.

"He's a man among boys out there," one unnamed National League scout recently told ChopTalk. "Physically, he is very strong, and he's an outstanding all-around athlete. It's amazing to me a guy like that was still on the board with the 14th overall pick."

Hours later, Heyward was at Turner Field watching batting practice and shaking hands with Bobby Cox, Jeff Francoeur and John Smoltz – who debuted with Atlanta in 1988, a year before Heyward was born.

"That whole day was unbelievable," Heyward said. "I got to go in the clubhouse, and they put me on the big screen."

Still, Heyward had a difficult decision to make – fulfill his commitment to UCLA or bypass college for a quicker route to the major leagues. Heyward's parents left his future in his hands.

"It was his decision," his father said.

After two months of negotiations, Heyward and the Braves agreed to terms on a deal that included a reported $1.7 million signing bonus. He received a portion of the money up front. The rest is due in January.

"The decision was pretty easy for me," said the 18-year-old. "I do think about what I'll be missing in college sometimes, but [becoming a professional baseball player] has been my goal all along."

Having put pen to paper on his first contract, Heyward found himself employed for the first time in his life. His parents, who decided early to allow their son to focus on academics and athletics, gave him a crash course in managing his finances.

"Before I graduated, I'd never had a bank account, never written a check or made a deposit," Heyward said. "It was all new to me."

Most of his bonus money, his parents said, will be invested to provide a financial safety net, should a career in the major leagues fail to materialize. Fancy cars and flashy jewelry do not appear to be part of his immediate future, replaced instead by words like "nest egg."

"We're conservative when it comes to money," Eugene said. "We've always believed that you should live below your means. He's accepted that, and it's working out really well for him."

Noted for his plate discipline and command of the strike zone, Heyward received a brief taste of minor league life last summer. He played in eight games for the Braves' rookie Gulf Coast League affiliate before being promoted to the advanced rookie-level Danville Braves in an effort to bolster their roster for the Appalachian League playoffs. Heyward hit .302 with a home run, four doubles and six RBIs in 12 combined games between the two stops. The transition to the wooden bat proved seamless.

"I've been playing with wood for a while," Heyward said. "The baseball part of it is not that different. Now, it's just magnified a little more. I was always told that it's not what you're doing when people are watching, but what you're doing when people aren't watching that matters most."

Heyward plans to leave for Atlanta's Florida spring training complex at Disney's Wide World of Sports on Feb. 26. In the meantime, he lifts weights three days a week in Kennesaw – headquarters for the East Cobb Astros travel team he played with – in addition to daily hitting and throwing. An outfielder by trade, he could figure into the Braves' future plans at either of the two corner outfield spots or possibly first base.

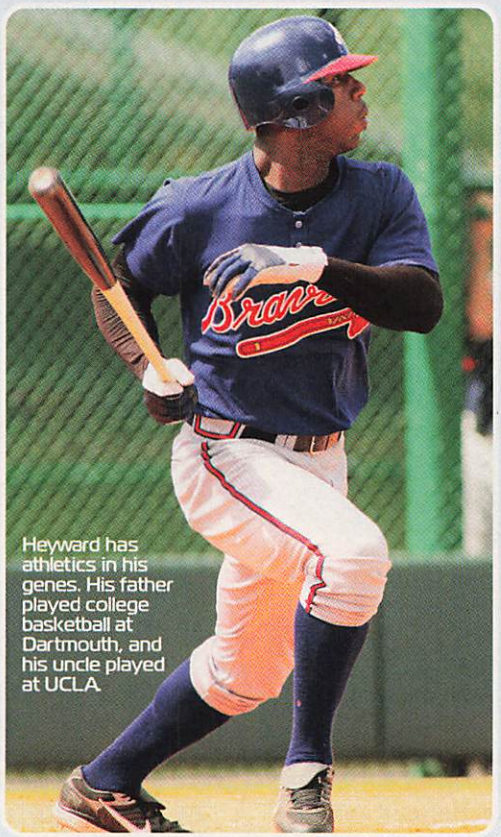
Heyward credits his father for his early athletic development. Eugene's experience as a college basketball player at Dartmouth prepared him to guide his son down the right path.

"That helped me tremendously," Heyward said of his father's influence. "He knew what to do to get it done, to get me in front of the right people. He's the reason I am where I am today."

The fourth Georgian drafted first by the Braves in the past eight years – Adam Wainwright (2000), Macay McBride (2001) and Francoeur (2002) – Heyward admits the idea of playing his home games 30 minutes from the house where he grew up is almost too good to be true.

"This is home for me," Heyward said. "This is where my family is, where I grew up, where I learned right from wrong. To be selected in the first round, to be able to start my career with the Braves... that's great for me."

> **"THIS IS HOME FOR ME. THIS IS WHERE MY FAMILY IS, WHERE I GREW UP, WHERE I LEARNED RIGHT FROM WRONG. TO BE SELECTED IN THE FIRST ROUND, TO BE ABLE TO START MY CAREER WITH THE BRAVES... THAT'S GREAT FOR ME."**



Heyward has athletics in his genes. His father played college basketball at Dartmouth, and his uncle played at UCLA.

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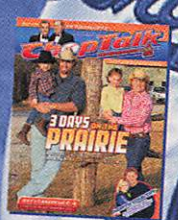

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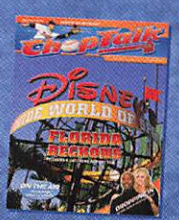

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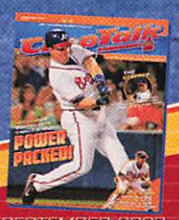

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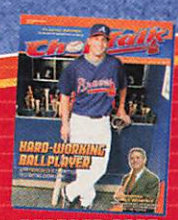

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BY BILL BALLEW

BRANDON JONES WELL PREPARED TO COMPETE IN ATLANTA OUTFIELD

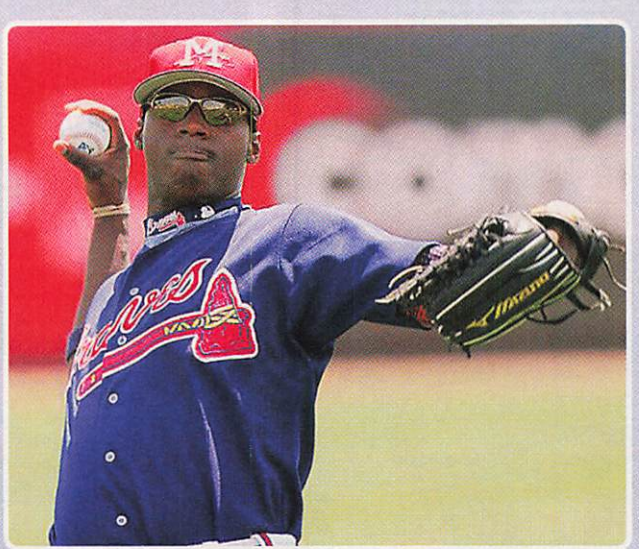
ANDRUW JONES may have signed a free-agent contract with the Los Angeles Dodgers during the winter meetings, but Braves fans could be keeping up with another Jones in the Atlanta outfield in 2008. Brandon Jones concluded a successful stint in winter ball with Navojoa in the Mexican Pacific League that solidified his chance to receive an extended look for the left field job during spring training.

In 41 games, Jones batted .289 with three home runs and 16 RBIs. He also scored 31 runs and stroked six doubles while splitting time between left field and center field. His time in Mexico came to an early end when he hurt his shoulder while trying to make a diving catch on Nov. 28. Jones returned home to Florida where the injury was diagnosed as minor by Braves physicians.

"Brandon went to Mexico and accomplished everything we hoped he would," said Kurt Kemp, the Braves' director of player development. "He jammed the shoulder a little bit, but he should be fine."

Jones played center field based on the team's needs. An outstanding all-around athlete, he has a body that's molded to be more conducive to being a corner outfielder with solid power potential, instead of a fleet-footed centerfielder who can run down balls in the gaps. While Jones may not be a burner, he has excellent overall speed and will be able to use his athleticism as an advantage in the field and on the basepaths in the major leagues.

The Braves were most encouraged with the way Jones made adjustments against veteran pitchers in Mexico. The league is known for its crafty pitchers who throw breaking balls out of the strike zone, and Jones displayed an increase in patience by laying off those offerings. By improving his overall pitch recognition and approach at the plate, the left-handed-hitting Jones hit lefthanders at a .340 clip, compared to a .260 batting average versus righthanders.



TOM PRIDDY

After a strong performance in Mexico, Brandon Jones appears ready to compete for a platoon role in left-field.

MORE WINTER PROGRESS

WHILE BRAVES general manager Frank Wren continues to evaluate various options to play center field in Atlanta, Gregor Blanco is making a strong case to join Brandon Jones as a candidate for a role in the Atlanta outfield.

Serving as the leadoff hitter for La Guaira in the Venezuelan League, the centerfielder owned a .324 batting average with four home runs and 14 RBIs in his first 46 games with the Sharks. Blanco ranked among the league leaders in batting average, on-base percentage, hits and runs scored, and was batting .385 in the first inning and .431 when leading off an inning. One aspect that Blanco continues to struggle with is stolen-base percentage. He was caught six times in his first 11 tries this winter.

Equally impressive has been the pitching of Jose Ortegano. After leading the Appalachian League with a 1.48 ERA last year, the 20-year-old lefthander has continued to excel for Caracas in Venezuela despite being one of the youngest players in the league. In his first 14 relief outings,

FARM TEAM STAFFS

TEAM	MANAGER	PITCHING COACH	HITTING COACH	TRAINER
RICHMOND	DAVE BRUNDAGE	GUY HANSEN	CHRIS CHAMBLISS	MIKE GRAUS
MISSISSIPPI	PHILLIP WELLMAN	DEREK BOTELHO	FRANKLIN STUBBS	RICKY ALCANTARA
MYRTLE BEACH	ROCKET WHEELER	BRUCE DAL CANTON	RICK ALBERT	GREG HALL
ROME	RANDY INGLE	JIM CZAJKOWSKI	BOBBY MOORE	CHAS MILLER
DANVILLE	PAUL RUNGE	DERRICK LEWIS	CARLOS MENDEZ	ERIC MALEK
GULF COAST	LUIS ORTIZ	GABE LUCKERT	SIXTO LEZCANO	ALLAN CHASE

Ortegano registered a 2-1 mark with a 1.78 ERA. He allowed only 22 hits in 33 1/3 innings, and continued to display impeccable command by issuing only seven walks versus 21 strikeouts.

"Jose's knowledge of pitching far outweighs his age," Kemp said. "He's not overpowering, but he knows how to pitch, and he is a great competitor. He uses his strengths to his advantage."

Jeff Bennett, who could compete for a job on the Atlanta pitching staff this spring, ranked second in the Venezuelan League with a 2.31 ERA while posting a 3-2 record for La Guaira. Carl Loadenthal, who ranked second in the Braves' organization with 40 stolen bases last season, topped the Venezuelan League with 11 steals in 14 attempts. Loadenthal's batting average was a modest .253 due to his .179 average versus left-handed pitchers, compared to .304 against righthanders.

CHAMBLISS JOINS STAFF

ALL SIX OF THE BRAVES' minor league managers from 2007 will return to their respective clubs for the 2008 season. The biggest change is the return of two veteran baseball men to the Atlanta organization as coaches. Chris Chambliss takes over the hitting coach duties at Triple-A Richmond, and Lynn Jones assumes the role as the farm system's roving outfield and baserunning coordinator.

Chambliss played seven seasons (1980-86) with Atlanta before managing the Braves' Double-A team in Greenville in 1991 and Richmond in 1992. Since leaving the organization, the former first baseman has been a major league hitting coach with three teams, including the St. Louis Cardinals (1993-95), New York Yankees (1996-2000) and Cincinnati Reds (2003-06). Chambliss replaces Leon Roberts, who becomes the new minor league hitting coordinator.

Jones, who managed Class A Rome in 2002, has spent the past two years as a roving outfield and baserunning coordinator in the Cincinnati organization. He had a similar job with the Red Sox in 2003 prior to spending the 2004 and 2005 seasons as Boston's first-base coach.

The other changes to the coaching staffs include the hiring of Carlos Mendez, a former first baseman who played at Richmond last

CONTINUED ON ON PAGE 47

THE HILL IS LOOKING A LITTLE LESS STEEP

AFTER SPENDING the season in Double-A for the first time and pitching this fall in Arizona, I feel good about the progress I made.

Ever since I signed, my career has been up and down. But the best thing about it has been how the Braves treated me. Other than my family, I've never had a group of people be more supportive. They have been outstanding in helping me maintain my confidence.

We made some minor mechanical adjustments this year. I became more comfortable as the season went on and felt good going to Arizona. It was great going to the fall league and facing some of the best hitters in the minor leagues. I felt like things came together, little by little, and now I need to carry that momentum into spring training.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Braves have held high hopes for Charlie Morton since they drafted him in the third round in 2002. The righthander has shown flashes of "potential" throughout his first five pro seasons. In 2007, he began to fulfill projections of success with more consistency, going 4-6 with a 4.29 ERA in 41 games at Double-A Mississippi, then posting a 4-1 record and a 2.57 ERA in six games (five starts) with Peoria in the Arizona Fall League

For some reason, the second half of every season has always been better than my first half. People have always suggested that I turned the corner, and that's why I really want to carry this over into spring training and into the first month of the season.

I know I need to get off to a good start, because I really haven't done that in my career. But I do feel like I've taken significant steps, thanks largely to the work Bo (Mississippi pitching coach Derek Botelho) did with me this past season.

> "I THINK I'M IN A GOOD SPOT, AND THE BRAVES ARE PLEASED WITH THE PROGRESS I'M MAKING."

With guys like Bo and Bruce Dal Canton (Myrtle Beach pitching coach) and many other coaches, I never felt they gave up on me when it would have been easy to do that. I feel like I've flown under everybody's radar, except for the coaches and other people in the organization.

Every single year, every time they worked with me, they would tell me, "When you reach your potential, Charlie, you're going to be something special." They showed faith and confidence in me, so I never got down on myself. No one showed more confidence in me than (Braves Hall of Fame scout and executive) Paul Snyder. I considered that to be an honor because of his incredible knowledge and history in this game.

I wouldn't change the hard times, the ups and downs, for anything. There's no substitute for that experience. I believe it has helped me, and I know it hasn't beaten me. I've had a very unimpressive minor league career thus far, but I definitely believe it's better to go through some of these things at this point. I've learned how to deal with failure, which I believe will help me when I get to the big leagues.

When I first signed, people asked me, "What do you want to do in the big leagues?" I'd always say I want to be a starter. Now, I really don't care about that. Whatever gets me to the big leagues is great.

I've always liked starting, but when they gave me the opportunity to pitch out of the bullpen at Double-A, that was great, too. Time will tell where the Braves feel they need me the most.

I feel like I have a much better perspective at this point. I think I'm in a good spot, and the Braves are pleased with the progress I'm making.

It's been an uphill battle, and while I'm still moving up, the climb doesn't appear to be quite as steep.

ROSTER

PITCHERS (24)

NO.	NAME	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2007 CLUB	W-L	ERA
46	ACOSTA, MANNY	R-R	6-4	170	5/1/81 in Colon, Panama	Colon, Panama	Richmond	9-3	2.26
							ATLANTA	1-1	2.28
30	BENNETT, JEFF	R-R	6-3	200	6/1/80 in Donelson, TN	Lebanon, TN	Mississippi	0-0	4.15
							Richmond	3-5	3.35
							ATLANTA	2-1	3.46
48	BOYER, BLAINE	R-R	6-3	215	7/11/81 in Atlanta, GA	Marietta, GA	Richmond	4-3	4.30
							ATLANTA	0-0	3.38
38	CARLYLE, BUDDY	L-R	6-3	185	12/21/77 in Omaha, NE	Papillion, NE	Richmond	5-2	2.59
							ATLANTA	8-7	5.21
--	CUEVAS, JAIRO	R-R	6-2	217	1/24/84 in Santo Domingo, D.R.	Santo Domingo, D.R.	Myrtle Beach	6-12	3.55
27	DEVINE, JOEY	R-R	5-11	205	9/19/83 in Junction City, KS	Junction City, KS	Mississippi	2-4	2.06
							ATLANTA	1-0	1.08
							Richmond	3-0	1.64
47	GLAVINE, TOM	L-L	6-0	204	3/25/66 in Concord, MA	Alpharetta, GA	NEW YORK (NL)	13-8	4.45
51	GONZALEZ, MIKE	R-L	6-2	213	5/23/78 in Robstown, TX	Deer Park, TX	ATLANTA	2-0	1.59
32	HAMPTON, MIKE	R-L	5-10	195	9/9/72 in Brooksville, FL	Homosassa, FL			
15	HUDSON, TIM	R-R	6-1	170	7/14/75 in Peachtree City, GA	Apollo Beach, FL	ATLANTA	16-10	3.33
36	JAMES, CHUCK	L-L	6-0	170	11/9/81 in Atlanta, GA	Mableton, GA	ATLANTA	11-10	4.24
--	JURRJENS, JAIR	R-R	6-1	160	1/29/86 in Willemstad, Curacao	Willemstad, Curacao	Erie	7-5	3.20
							DETROIT	3-1	4.70
50	LEREW, ANTHONY	L-R	6-3	220	10/28/82 in Carlisle, PA	Wellsville, PA	Richmond	1-0	1.37
							ATLANTA	0-2	7.71
--	MORTON, CHARLIE	R-R	6-4	190	10/12/83 in Flemington, NJ	Redding, CT	Mississippi	4-6	4.29
58	MOYLAN, PETER	R-R	6-2	200	12/2/78 in Lesmurdie, Australia	Lesmurdie, Australia	Richmond	0-0	0.00
							ATLANTA	5-3	1.80
--	OHMAN, WILL	L-L	6-2	205	8/13/77 in Frankfurt, W. Germany	Mesa, AZ	CHICAGO (NL)	2-4	4.95
							Iowa	0-0	2.70
--	RESOP, CHRIS	R-R	6-3	215	11/4/82 in Naples, FL	Naples, FL	Salt Lake	1-3	4.57
							LOS ANGELES (AL)	0-0	4.15
37	REYES, JO-JO	L-L	6-2	230	11/20/84 in West Covina, CA	Riverside, CA	Mississippi	8-1	3.56
							Richmond	4-0	1.00
							ATLANTA	2-2	6.22
34	RING, ROYCE	L-L	6-0	220	12/21/80 in La Mesa, CA	La Mesa, CA	Portland	4-0	1.99
							SAN DIEGO	1-0	3.60
							Richmond	1-2	5.68
							ATLANTA	0-0	0.00
--	SCHREIBER, ZACH	R-R	6-1	205	6/24/82 in Cedar Rapids, IA	Cedar Rapids, IA	Mississippi	3-5	2.22
							Richmond	1-1	2.43
29	SMOLTZ, JOHN	R-R	6-3	220	5/15/67 in Warren, MI	Duluth, GA	ATLANTA	14-8	3.11
39	SORIANO, RAFAEL	R-R	6-1	220	12/19/79 in San Jose, D.R.	Santo Domingo, D.R.	ATLANTA	3-3	3.00
--	STOCKMAN, PHIL	R-R	6-8	251	1/25/80 in Oldham, Lancashire UK	Brisbane, Australia	GCL Braves	0-0	7.20
							Mississippi	1-0	0.59
							Richmond	1-0	1.72
33	YATES, TYLER	R-R	6-4	240	8/7/77 in Lihue, HI	Koloa, HI	ATLANTA	2-3	5.18

CATCHERS (3)

NO.	NAME	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2007 CLUB	AVG	G
16	McCANN, BRIAN	L-R	6-3	210	2/20/84 in Athens, GA	Duluth, GA	ATLANTA	.333	130
							Rome	.286	2
8	PENA, BRAYAN	S-R	5-11	210	1/7/82 in Havana, Cuba	San Jose, Costa Rica	ATLANTA	.212	16
							Richmond	.301	94
18	SAMMONS, CLINT	R-R	6-0	200	5/15/83 in Decatur, GA	Atlanta, GA	Myrtle Beach	.269	23
							Mississippi	.243	83
							ATLANTA	.667	2

INFIELDERS (8)

NO.	NAME	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2007 CLUB	AVG	G
--	AYBAR, WILLY	S-R	5-11	200	3/9/83 in Bani, D.R.	Bani, D.R.			
19	ESCOBAR, YUNEL	R-R	6-2	200	11/2/82 in Havana, Cuba	Miami, FL	Richmond	.333	46
							ATLANTA	.326	94
--	INFANTE, OMAR	R-R	6-0	180	12/26/81 in Puerto la Cruz, VZ	Guanta, VZ	DETROIT	.271	66
							Toledo	.368	10
2	JOHNSON, KELLY	L-R	6-1	205	2/22/82 in Austin, TX	Atlanta, GA	ATLANTA	.276	147
10	JONES, CHIPPER	S-R	6-4	210	4/24/72 in DeLand, FL	Carrizo Springs, TX	ATLANTA	.337	134
1	PRADO, MARTIN	R-R	6-1	190	10/27/83 in Maracay, Venezuela	Maracay, Venezuela	Richmond	.316	103
							ATLANTA	.288	28
24	TEIXEIRA, MARK	S-R	6-3	220	4/11/80 in Annapolis, MD	Westlake, TX	TEXAS	.297	78
							ATLANTA	.317	54
20	THORMAN, SCOTT	L-R	6-3	235	1/6/82 in Cambridge, Ontario	Cambridge, Ontario	Richmond	.216	120

OUTFIELDERS (5)

NO.	NAME	B-T	HT	WT	BIRTHDATE-PLACE	RESIDENCE	2007 CLUB	AVG	G
--	ANDERSON, JOSH	L-R	6-2	195	8/10/82 in Somerset, KY	Eubank, KY	Round Rock	.273	132
							HOUSTON	.358	21
61	BLANCO, GREGOR	L-L	5-11	170	12/12/83 in Caracas, VZ	Cua, VZ	Richmond	.282	124
23	DIAZ, MATT	R-R	6-1	205	3/3/78 in Portland, OR	Lakeland, FL	ATLANTA	.338	135
7	FRANCOEUR, JEFF	R-R	6-4	220	1/8/84 in Atlanta, GA	Lilburn, GA	ATLANTA	.293	162
28	JONES, BRANDON	L-R	6-1	210	12/10/83 in Panama City, FL	Wewahitchka, FL	Mississippi	.293	94
							Richmond	.300	44
							ATLANTA	.158	5

Injury Rehabilitation Assignment; Includes injury rehabilitation time
** 60-day disabled list
^ Restricted list
* Option year is *not* included in contract status

G	GS	CG	SV	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	ML SERV	CONTRACT
40	0	0	12	59.2	46	18	15	35	56	0.052	2007
21	0	0	0	23.2	13	6	6	14	22		
6	0	0	0	8.2	7	4	4	6	7	1.012	2007
36	6	0	1	86.0	84	32	32	34	45		
3	2	0	0	13.0	14	5	5	3	14		
21	12	0	2	73.1	76	40	35	50	62	1.122	2007
5	0	0	0	5.1	10	3	2	1	3		
9	9	1	0	48.2	40	15	14	9	56	1.055	2007
22	20	0	0	107.0	117	67	62	32	74		
25	25	0	0	132.0	113	74	52	71	116	0.000	2007
33	0	0	16	35.0	26	9	8	13	51	0.171	2007
10	0	0	0	8.1	7	1	1	8	7		
17	0	0	4	22.0	15	5	4	6	27		
34	34	1	0	200.1	219	102	99	64	89	20.052	2008
18	0	0	2	17.0	15	3	3	8	13	4.014	2007
Injured - Did Not Play										14.073	2008
34	34	1	0	224.1	221	87	83	53	132	8.119	2009*
30	30	0	0	161.1	164	77	76	58	116	2.018	2007
19	19	1	0	112.2	112	43	40	31	94	0.047	2007
7	7	0	0	30.2	24	16	16	11	13		
5	5	0	0	26.1	20	5	4	8	15	1.008	2007
3	3	0	0	11.2	14	10	10	7	9		
41	6	0	0	79.2	80	41	38	37	67	0.000	2007
2	0	0	1	2.0	0	0	0	1	3	1.061	2007
80	0	0	1	90.0	65	27	18	31	63		
56	0	0	1	36.1	42	20	20	16	33	5.027	2007
9	0	0	0	6.2	7	2	2	5	9		
27	0	0	0	45.1	50	26	23	16	39	1.031	2008
4	0	0	0	4.1	4	2	2	1	2		
13	13	0	0	73.1	63	31	29	35	71	0.087	2007
6	6	0	0	36.0	25	7	4	12	39		
11	10	0	0	50.2	55	39	35	30	27		
27	0	0	1	31.2	22	8	7	11	44	1.002	2007
15	0	0	0	15.0	11	8	6	14	17		
15	0	0	1	12.2	17	9	8	7	14		
11	0	0	0	5.0	2	0	0	3	4		
34	0	0	5	44.2	26	13	11	22	38	0.000	2007
24	0	0	1	33.1	25	12	9	11	38		
32	32	0	0	205.2	196	78	71	47	197	19.072	2008*
71	0	0	9	72.0	47	26	24	15	70	5.057	2007
3	0	0	0	5.0	5	4	4	1	9	0.110	2007
12	0	0	3	15.1	8	2	1	7	17		
9	0	0	0	15.2	7	3	3	6	15		
75	0	0	2	66.0	64	44	38	31	69	3.050	2007

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML SERV	CONTRACT
442	61	147	34	0	24	93	41	54	2	1.117	2012*
7	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	0		
33	2	7	0	0	1	3	0	3	0	1.026	2007
345	42	104	20	2	6	48	19	38	5		
78	13	21	6	0	4	13	10	14	1	0.020	2007
296	27	72	10	0	5	36	26	72	1		
3	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0		

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML SERV	CONTRACT
Did Not Play											
180	20	60	10	3	2	29	14	27	7	0.121	2007
319	54	104	25	0	5	28	27	44	5		
166	24	45	6	1	2	17	9	29	4	4.120	2007
38	3	14	2	0	0	4	4	2	0		
521	91	144	26	10	16	68	79	117		2.127	2007
513	108	173	42	4	29	102	82	75	5	14.024	2008*
395	61	125	23	3	4	41	34	41	5	0.105	2007
59	5	17	3	0	0	2	3	6	0		
286	48	85	24	1	13	49	45	66	0	5.000	2007
208	38	66	9	1	17	56	27	46	0		
287	37	62	18	0	11	36	14	70	1	1.090	2007

AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB	ML SERV	CONTRACT
513	64	140	17	6	2	43	32	75	40	0.030	2007
67	10	24	3	0	0	11	5	6	1		
464	81	131	18	5	3	35	63	85	23	0.000	2007
358	44	121	21	0	12	45	16	63	4	1.157	2007
642	84	188	40	0	19	105	42	129	5	2.088	2007
365	58	107	21	6	15	74	44	84	12	0.015	2007
170	26	51	12	11	4	26	17	36	5		
19	0	3	1	0	0	4	0	8	0		

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

season, as the hitting coach for Atlanta's Gulf Coast League club, and one-step promotions for pitching coaches Jim Czajkowski (Danville to Rome), Derrick Lewis (Gulf Coast to Rome) and Gabe Luckert (Dominican Summer League to Gulf Coast).

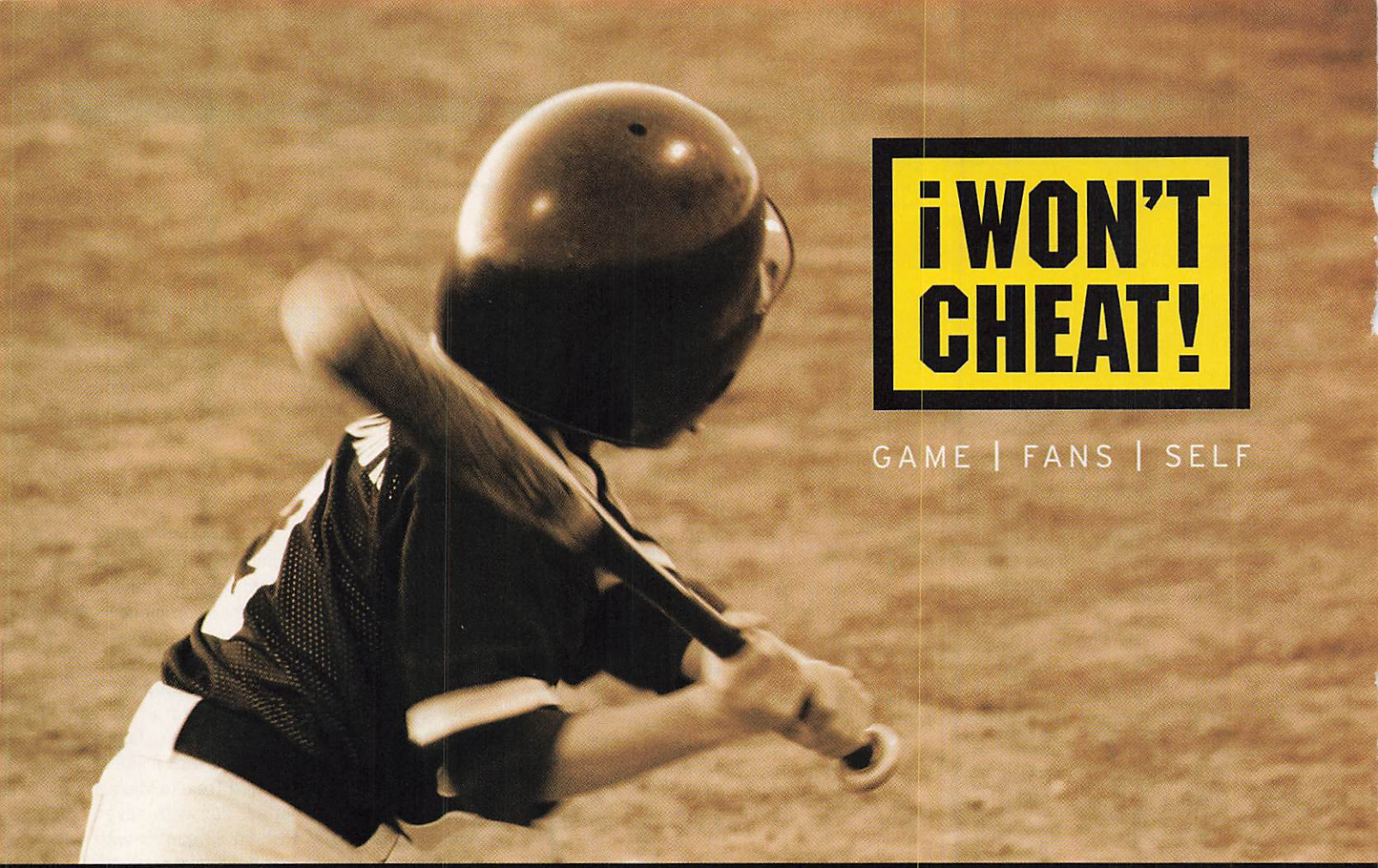
NOTES

- The Braves lost two players in the Rule 5 draft at the winter meetings. Righthander Sergio Valenzuela, who went a combined 1-3 with a 7.00 ERA in 32 outings between Class A Rome and Myrtle Beach, was taken by Cincinnati with the sixth overall pick in the major league portion of the draft. The Rangers selected third baseman Jaime Trejo with the final pick in the Triple-A phase. The Braves optioned Trejo to Mexico in 2007, when he batted .265 with seven home runs and 34 RBIs in 83 games with Angelopolis. Atlanta did not take a player in any phase of the Rule 5 draft.

- Baseball America rated centerfielder Jordan Schafer as the eighth-best prospect in the Arizona Fall League and righthander Kris Medlen as the ninth-best prospect in Hawaii Winter Baseball. Schafer, who led the minors with 176 hits in 2007, continued his torrid play by batting .324 with 16 RBIs and 10 stolen bases for Peoria. Medlen struck out 27 of the 58 batters he faced with Honolulu while posting a 1.88 ERA.

- The Braves signed six-year minor league free agents Joe Borchard and Jonathan Rouwenhorst. Borchard, an outfielder/first baseman and a former two-sport standout at Stanford, batted .355 with eight homers and 28 RBIs in 22 games at Triple-A Albuquerque after being sent down from Florida, where he hit .196 in 85 games. The 28-year-old Rouwenhorst, a lefthander, went 10-10 with a 4.96 ERA in 33 games (26 starts) at Triple-A Salt Lake in 2007.

- Atlanta released outfielder Matt Esquivel. The rightfielder tied for second in the organization with 19 home runs and 70 RBIs last year but was suspended for unspecified reasons in late July for the third time in four seasons.



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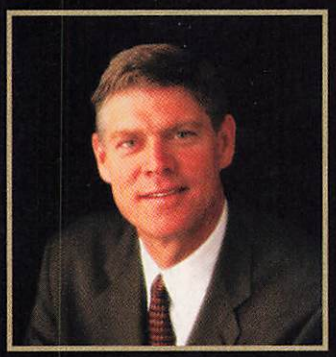
GAME | FANS | SELF



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–Dale Murphy

2 TIME NL MVP, ATLANTA BRAVES

FOUNDER OF THE I WON'T CHEAT FOUNDATION

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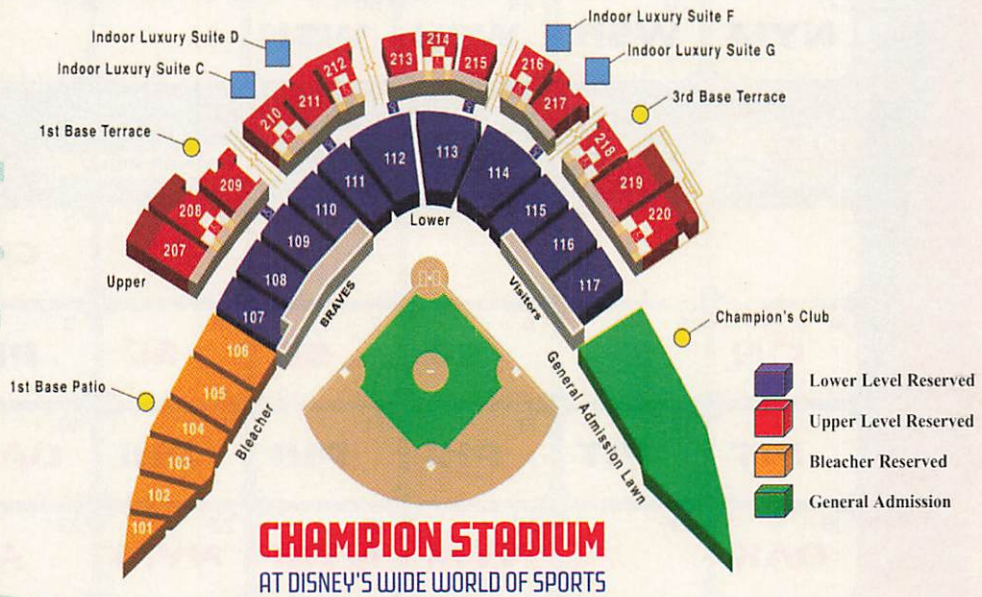
Braves SPRING TRAINING 2008

SPRING TRAINING TICKET INFO

Individual tickets for the 2008 Atlanta Braves Spring Training home games at Disney's Wide World of Sports complex in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., will go on sale Jan. 5 at Ticketmaster (407-839-3900), Ticketmaster.com and the Disney Wide World of Sports complex box office. At press time, price information for single tickets was not available.

Call (407) 939-GAME (4263) for additional information, including details on season and group tickets, or visit disneysports.com/atlantabraves. Season tickets are the same price as last year - $320 for Lower Level Reserved and $280 for Upper Level Reserved and Bleacher Reserved. Mini-plans are available for $102.50 (five games) and $61.50 (three games).

The schedule below is tentative, incomplete and subject to change. Game times pending. No broadcast information has been released.



CHAMPION STADIUM
AT DISNEY'S WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS

FEBRUARY/MARCH

DISNEY | AWAY

Tentative; subject to change; times pending.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			27 1:05 PM UNIV. OF GEORGIA	28 TBA	29 1:05 PM LA	1 HOU @ KISSIMMEE
2 1:05 PM HOU	3 1:10 PM NYM @ PORT ST. LUCIE	4 1:05 PM PHI	5 1:05 PM CLE @ WINTER HAVEN	6 1:05 PM DET @ LAKELAND	7 1:05 PM DET	8 1:05 PM HOU*
9 1:05 PM STL	10 1:05 PM STL	11 7:05 PM WAS	12 7:05 PM CLE	13 1:05 PM DET @ LAKELAND	14 TBA PHI @ CLEARWATER	15 1:05 PM TAM*
16 1:05 PM STL @ JUPITER	17 1:05 PM STL @ JUPITER	18 TBA	19 TBA	20 7:05 PM DET	21 1:05 PM CLE	22 TBA
23 1:05 PM HOU	24 1:05 PM CLE @ WINTER HAVEN	25 1:10 PM NYM @ PORT ST. LUCIE	26 1:05 PM WAS	27 1:05 PM NYM	28 CLE @ TURNER FIELD	29 CLE @ TURNER FIELD

* SPLIT SQUAD

TENTATIVE; SUBJECT TO CHANGE. TIMES, BROADCAST INFORMATION TO BE ANNOUNCED.
FOR SEASON, GROUP AND SUITE TICKET INFORMATION, CALL (404) 577-9100 OR VISIT braves.com

MARCH/APRIL

TURNER FIELD | AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	31 PIT OPENING DAY	1	2 PIT	3 PIT	4 NYM	5 NYM
6 NYM	7 COL	8 COL	9 COL	10 COL	11 WSH	12 WSH
13 WSH	14	15 FLA	16 FLA	17 FLA	18 LAD	19 LAD
20 LAD	21 WSH	22 WSH	23 FLA	24 FLA	25 NYM	26 NYM
27 NYM	28 WSH	29 WSH	30 WSH			

MAY

TURNER FIELD | AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2 CIN	3 CIN
4 CIN	5	6 SD	7 SD	8 SD	9 PIT	10 PIT
11 PIT	12 PIT	13 PHI	14 PHI	15 PHI	16 OAK	17 OAK
18 OAK	19	20 NYM	21 NYM	22 NYM	23 AZ	24 AZ
25 AZ	26 AZ	27 MIL	28 MIL	29 MIL	30 CIN	31 CIN

JUNE

TURNER FIELD | AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 CIN	2 FLA	3 FLA	4 FLA	5 FLA	6 PHI	7 PHI
8 PHI	9	10 CHI	11 CHI	12 CHI	13 LAA	14 LAA
15 LAA	16	17 TX	18 TX	19 TX	20 SEA	21 SEA
22 SEA	23 MIL	24 MIL	25 MIL	26	27 TOR	28 TOR
29 TOR	30					

JULY

ALL-STAR GAME | TURNER FIELD | AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 PHI	2 PHI	3 PHI	4 HOU	5 HOU
6 HOU	7 LAD	8 LAD	9 LAD	10	11 SD	12 SD
13 SD	14	15 ALL-STAR GAME YANKEE STADIUM	16	17	18 WSH	19 WSH
20 WSH	21 FLA	22 FLA	23 FLA	24	25 PHI	26 PHI
27 PHI	28 STL	29 STL	30 STL	31 STL		

AUGUST

TURNER FIELD | AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 MIL	2 MIL
3 MIL	4 SF	5 SF	6 SF	7 AZ	8 AZ	9 AZ
10 AZ	11	12 CHI	13 CHI	14 CHI	15 SF	16 SF
17 SF	18 SF	19 NYM	20 NYM	21 NYM	22 STL	23 STL
24 STL	25	26 FLA	27 FLA	28 FLA	29 WSH	30 WSH
31 WSH						

SEPTEMBER

TURNER FIELD | AWAY

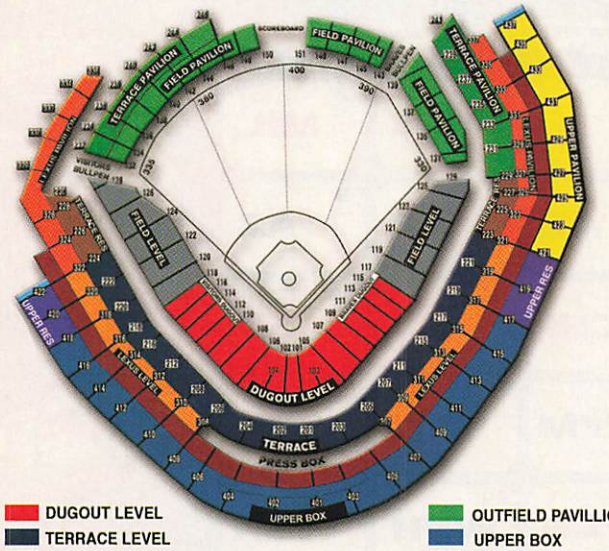
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 FLA	2 FLA	3 FLA	4 WSH	5 WSH	6 WSH
7 WSH	8	9 COL	10 COL	11 COL	12 NYM	13 NYM
14 NYM	15	16 PHI	17 PHI	18 PHI	19 NYM	20 NYM
21 NYM	22 PHI	23 PHI	24 PHI	25	26 HOU	27 HOU
28 HOU	29	30				

TICKETING

TO PURCHASE SEASON TICKETS OR FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL (404) 577-9100 OR VISIT braves.com

TICKET INFO

At press time, the Braves had not announced information about individual tickets for the 2008 season. Refundable deposits of $100 for full and partial season tickets are being accepted at Braves.com or by calling (404) 577-9100.



- DUGOUT LEVEL
- TERRACE LEVEL
- FIELD LEVEL
- LEXUS
- OUTFIELD PAVILLION
- UPPER BOX
- TERRACE RESERVED
- LEXUS PAVILLION
- UPPER PAVILION

MUSEUM & TOUR INFO

The Ivan Allen Jr. Braves Museum features more than 500 Braves artifacts that trace the team's history from its beginnings in Boston (1871-1952) to Milwaukee (1953-65) to Atlanta (1966-present). It is located on the northwest side of Turner Field at aisle 134. The museum opens two and a half hours before each game and closes in the middle of the seventh inning. The museum is open year-round and is the starting point of one-hour guided tours of Turner Field. Tours leave on the hour.

Tour reservations are not necessary for individuals or groups of less than 20 people. Tickets can be purchased the day of the tour at the main ticket window. Free parking in the Green lot.

Admission to the museum during games is one token ($2) and $5 on non-game days. Tour tickets are $10 for adults, $5 for children and $7 for groups of 20 or more. Walk-up tickets can be purchased at the ticket window. Groups of 20 or more and school groups must make reservations two weeks in advance by calling (404) 614-2311.

HOURS OF OPERATION

APRIL - OCTOBER	
Monday - Saturday	9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Sunday	1 - 3 p.m.
OCTOBER - MARCH	
Monday - Saturday	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
DEC. 23-JAN. 3	CLOSED

TOUR TICKETS

ADULTS	$10
CHILDREN 13 and Under	$5

*Subject to change

Tours not available when the Braves have afternoon home games

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STAT PARADE 2007

RECORD BREAKDOWN

SCORE FIRST	59-30 (.663)
LEAD AFTER 6 INNINGS	67-6 (.918)
TRAIL AFTER 6 INNINGS	11-64 (.147)
LEAD AFTER 8 INNINGS	75-3 (.962)
TRAIL AFTER 8 INNINGS	4-69 (.055)
FIRST GAME OF SERIES	32-19 (.627)
FIRST GAME OF HOMESTAND	8-3 (.727)
FIRST GAME OF ROAD TRIP	9-3 (.750)
FOLLOWING AN OFF DAY	16-4 (.800)
WITH A HOME RUN	64-40 (.615)
WITHOUT A HOME RUN	20-38 (.345)
OPPONENTS SCORE FIRST	25-48(.342)
1-RUN DECISIONS	18-25 (.419)
2-RUN DECISIONS	15-13 (.536)
3-RUN DECISIONS	11-14 (.440)
ALLOW A HOME RUN	47-58 (.448)

CATCHER CUTDOWNS

SAMMONS	1/2 (.500)
PENA	2/6 (.333)
MILLER	1/3 (.333)
MCCANN	17/87 (.195)
SALTALAMACCHIA	5/26 (.192)

STAFF ERA
RECORD BY CATCHER

MCCANN	3.90/70-60
SAMMONS	4.00/0-1
MILLER	4.50/4-2
SALTALAMACCHIA	4.72/10-10
PENA	5.92/0-5

TOP BATTERS
VS. LH PITCHERS

DIAZ	.356
ESCOBAR	.355
RENTERIA	.349
TEIXEIRA	.342
FRANCOEUR	.317

PITCHERS
VS. LH BATTERS

C. JONES	.378
RENTERIA	.323
DIAZ	.318
ESCOBAR	.303
TEIXEIRA	.303

TEAM RECORD
BY STARTING PITCHER

HUDSON	22-12 (.647)
JAMES	17-13 (.567)
SMOLTZ	18-14 (.563)
CARLYLE	11-9 (.550)
BENNETT	1-1 (.500)
DAVIES	7-10 (.412)
CORMIER	3-6 (.333)
LEREW	1-2 (.333)
REYES	3-7(.300)
REDMAN	1-4 (.200)

TOP BATTERS
VS. RH PITCHERS

SORIANO	.164
MOYLAN	.242
JAMES	.252
HUDSON	.261
SMOLTZ	.262

PITCHERS
VS. RH BATTERS

MOYLAN	.184
YATES	.213
VILLARREAL	.220
CARLYLE	.229
SMOLTZ	.237
HUDSON	.261
JAMES	.268

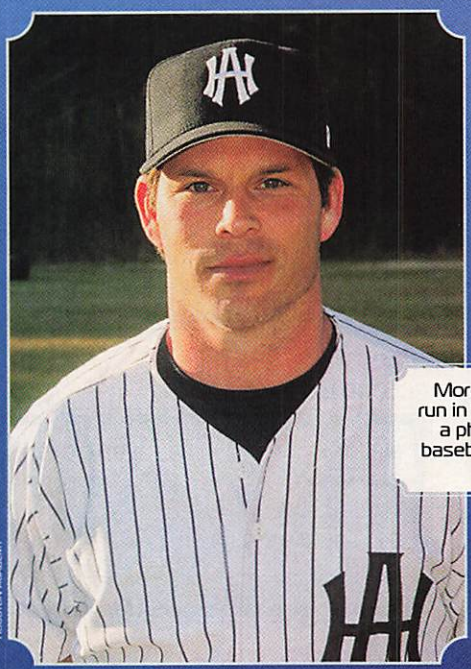
AVERAGE RUN SUPPORT

CARLYLE	5.7
REYES	5.6
HUDSON	5.6
DAVIES	5.0
JAMES	4.9
SMOLTZ	4.7
CORMIER	4.1
REDMAN	4.0
LEREW	2.7
BENNETT	2.5

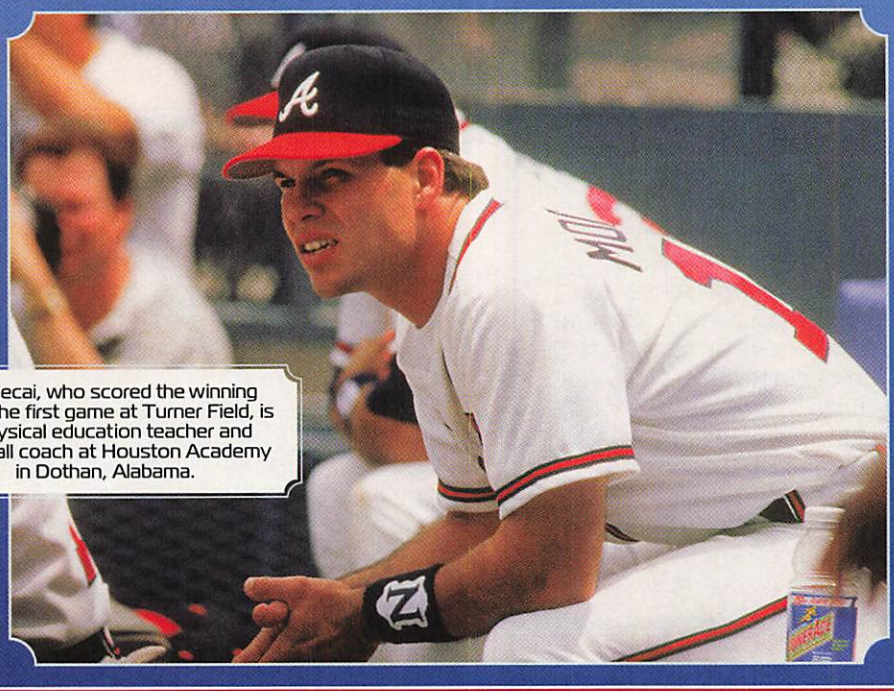
ATLANTA BRAVES

INFIELD HITS

FRANCOEUR	18
RENTERIA	14
DIAZ	11
JOHNSON	11
ESCOBAR	10



HOUSTON ACADEMY



ATLANTA BRAVES

Mordecai, who scored the winning run in the first game at Turner Field, is a physical education teacher and baseball coach at Houston Academy in Dothan, Alabama.

NEW CHALLENGE

Mike Mordecai Passing On His Knowledge and Passion to High School Players

BY BRIAN KNAPP

MIKE MORDECAI REMEMBERS the career-long fight to hold onto a major league job as a "constant struggle." For parts of a dozen seasons (1994-2005), he lived, worked and played with the threat of daily demotion hanging over his head. So goes life at the end of the bench.

"It's why I have a head full of *gray* hair," Mordecai said through a serious laugh.

A consummate utility man, his grit and determination led to his finding favor with some of the game's most accomplished strategists, men who repeatedly called upon him to produce in the clutch.

"Knowing I was always the 24th or 25th guy on the roster, I knew I had to show up to the park ready to play," Mordecai said. "As a bench guy, you never know when you would get in the game."

From his rookie season to his last, Mordecai showed a penchant for the big hit. On May 10, 1994 – just two days after he made his big-league debut with the Braves – the former two-time collegiate All-American approached the plate for his second career at-bat. With Atlanta in an 8-4 hole, Mordecai settled in to face Philadelphia closer Doug Jones – one of only 21 relievers in history to save 300 games. Known for his tantalizing changeup, the veteran righthander elected to challenge the 26-year-old rookie.

"When I got in the box, I was looking fastball," Mordecai said. "And he threw it."

He sent the Jones offering over the wall in left field, and the Braves drew within a run on his first hit in the majors – a three-run homer. Atlanta tied the game later in the inning and won it on a bunt single from Mike Stanton in the bottom of the 15th inning.

Joy was short-lived, however. Mordecai played in two more games before the Braves optioned him back to the minor leagues. News only got worse as the summer wore on. The players' strike of 1994 ended his rookie season prematurely.

"It was tough," Mordecai said. "I had spent a little less than 20-something days in the big leagues. I was chomping at the bit. You had to sit, wait and trust guys you really had no relationship with. I had only heard of Donald Fehr (head of the MLB Players Association)."

Mordecai never considered crossing the picket line, despite the financial hardship and uncertainty the work stoppage brought him.

"That wasn't even an option for me," he said. "I had worked too hard to do something like that. I had friends in the minor leagues who crossed over (during spring training), and they didn't last much longer."

The strike ended in April 1995, and Mordecai made the 25-man roster out of spring training. The Braves won a league-best 90 games and advanced to the World Series for the third time in five years, beating the Cleveland Indians in six games. It remains Atlanta's only world championship.

"I felt like I coat-tailed on that thing," Mordecai said. "Those guys had already been to two World Series (1991 and '92). I like

to think I was a small piece of the puzzle."

A sixth-round draft pick out of the University of South Alabama in 1989, Mordecai spent four seasons with the Braves, batting .231 with six home runs and 25 runs batted in. He caught Ted Turner's ceremonial first pitch before the inaugural regular season game at Turner Field in 1997 and then later scored the game-winning run.

Granted free agency before the 1998 season, he signed with the Montreal Expos. Mordecai enjoyed his best season north of the border in 2001, hitting .280 and establishing career-highs in at-bats (254), hits (71), doubles (17), RBIs (32) and total bases (101). In his 12-year career with three teams, he batted .244.

The scrappy infielder, who mainly played second base and third base but also played some first base and shortstop, reached the post-season once more after leaving Atlanta. As a member of the Florida Marlins in 2003, Mordecai delivered a pivotal three-run double in the eighth inning of Game 6 of the National League Championship Series against the Cubs. Florida won the series in seven games and went on to upset the Yankees in the World Series. Mordecai retired two years later.

"I felt like I was getting to a point where I was going to the plate and having to cheat a little more," Mordecai said. "I think I got the most out of my ability. There just wasn't an opportunity out there, and I had teammates I could have been a daddy to."

Mentored by two managers – Bobby Cox and Jack McKeon – with World Series rings, Mordecai decided to pass on what he had learned over his 17 years in professional baseball. Coaching provides his next challenge.

Entering his third year as the head baseball coach at Houston Academy in Dothan, Ala., Mordecai now finds himself in the managerial seat. His team reached the state semifinals last season before bowing out to the eventual state champion. Teaching the game has become a passion.

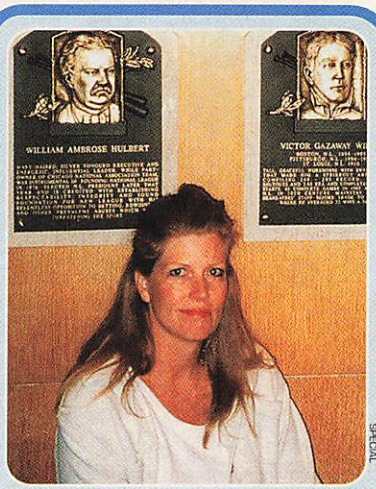
"I tried to learn as much as I could from the managers I played under," Mordecai said. "My greatest joy comes from being able to talk to these kids and watching them go play and do some of the things we talked about. I just want to pass on what I know to my players, so one day they can pass it on to their kids."

Mordecai, who turned 40 in December, resides in Dothan, Ala., with his wife of eight years, Jennifer, and their three sons. A 12-year-old daughter from a previous marriage lives in Atlanta.

HOW I MADE IT TO THE MAJORS

MINDY ELLIS
HALL OF FAME SCULPTOR

BY STEVE FALL



SPECIAL

AS AN 11-YEAR-OLD, Mindy Ellis went to Pittsburgh's Forbes Field with her art class on days when the Pirates weren't playing. She and the other students would imagine a ballgame going on and draw.

Today, Ellis sculpts baseball's greatest players when they earn the sport's ultimate honor. She has now sculpted plaques for 54 members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. Sometime in the future, she may find herself working on Cooperstown hopefuls like John Smoltz and Chipper Jones.

"The main thing is to capture the likeness and the personality of that player, and try to pick up on any character lines," said Ellis, who works remotely for Matthews International Corporation from her home in Pittsburgh.

Working entirely from photographs, Ellis completes life-size Hall of Fame sculptures in clay. Depending on the player and the quality of the photo, it may take from six hours to several days to finish. She then takes her work of art in clay to Matthews, a company that specializes in memorial products, who transforms it into a bronze bust.

The 49-year-old Ellis, a Pirates fan, has sculpted for 14 years for Matthews. She has also done plaques for the Boston Red Sox and the San Diego Padres' Hall of Fames, and averages about 100-140 plaques per year. In addition, Ellis has crafted plaques for football, golf, and race car driving. Not limited to sports, Ellis also sculpts animals and other subjects. She recently worked on the memorial for the Space Shuttle Columbia.

Ellis earned a degree in fine arts from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, where she focused on wood furniture construction and design. She worked in the woodworking industry for several years. In addition to furniture, she made wood sculptures for churches and country clubs. When she learned Matthews was looking for a sculptor – she completed some prototypes in clay – and landed her present job.

"At that time, they had already been doing the Baseball Hall of Fame plaques," said Ellis. "They gave me an opportunity – then they asked me after a couple of years if I could do the Baseball Hall of Fame plaques."

Aspiring sports artists won't find a structured career path. Ellis, who has studied art nearly her entire life, suggests starting at as young an age as possible.

"The most important thing – if you want to be any kind of an artist – is to be able to draw. Study everything around you," she said.

Ellis practiced art by drawing people in a sketchbook while riding on mass transit. She found that skill carried over to other media such as clay. Although it doesn't impact her Hall of Fame work, Ellis explained how most sports artists face a challenge to draw game action. No matter what the subject, she stressed the importance of examining everything in detail.

"It's so important to really look at things, especially when you're doing this type of work with portraiture," said Ellis. "It's realistic. You can't take a lot of artistic license with something like that, because the job is to make it look as real as possible."

ALUMNI NOTES

Manager Dave Johnson (bottom/right corner) and general manager Bob Watson (upper/left corner) led Team USA to its first World Cup championship since 1974.

- The Lotte Giants named **Jerry Royster** (INF/OF, 1976-84, '88) as their new manager, making him the first foreigner to oversee one of South Korea's professional baseball teams. Royster, who received a two-year contract with an option for a third season, managed the Milwaukee Brewers in 2002 and most recently managed the Dodgers' Triple-A affiliate in Las Vegas.

- Team USA, with **Dave Johnson** (2B/1B, 1973-75) as manager and **Bob Watson** (1B, 1982-84) as general manager, won baseball's World Cup for the first time since 1974, beating Cuba, 6-3, in the title game Nov. 18 in Taiwan. It broke Cuba's streak of nine straight World Cups.

- **Dale Murphy** (OF/1B/C, 1976-90) will participate in the Intelligence Squared U.S., the Oxford style, three-on-three debate series sponsored by The Rosenkranz Foundation, Jan. 15 at 6 p.m. at Asia Society and Museum in New York City. Murphy will be among three speakers *against* the motion: We should accept performance-enhancing drugs in competitive sports. Bob Costas will be the moderator. Visit intelligencesquaredus.org for information. The event is sold out.

  Murphy's son, Shawn, an offensive lineman at Utah State (Nov. '06 CT), has been invited to the East-West Shrine Game Jan. 19 at the University of Houston. It is a major scouting event for NFL teams preparing for the draft.

- **Andruw Jones** (CF, 1996-2007) signed a two-year contract with the Dodgers.

- **Mike Cather** (RHP, 1997-99) will return for his second year as pitching coach of the Portland (Maine) Sea Dogs, the Boston Red Sox's Double-A affiliate.

- **Joey Jay** (RHP, 1953-60, '66) will be inducted into the Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame in July.

- **Joe Torre** (C/1B, 1960-68; Manager, 1982-84) had knee replacement surgery Dec. 5.

- **Ron Schueler** (RHP, 1972-73) was named a senior advisor by the San Francisco Giants.

- The Detroit Tigers traded **Jose Capellan** (RHP, 2004) to Colorado.

- **Bruce Chen** (LHP, 1998-2000) is in Arizona rehabilitating from **Tommy John** surgery in October. He will miss the 2008 season.

- **Darrell Evans** (3B/1B, 1969-76, '89), manager of the Long Beach Armada in the independent Golden Baseball League, was among the former players attending the Major League Baseball Players Association Alumni Legends Charity Dinner Nov. 30 in Las Vegas to benefit the Young Readers Council.

- **Roberto Kelly** (1994, OF) was named first base coach by the San Francisco Giants.

BIRTHDAYS

JANUARY

3RD	ADRIAN GARRETT (65)
5TH	TOM KELLEY (64)
	MILT THOMPSON (49)
	JOHN RUSSELL (47)
	MARK REDMAN (34)
6TH	NORM CHARLTON (45)
	SCOTT THORMAN (26)
7TH	ALVIN DARK (86)
	CARLOS DIAZ (50)
	BRAYAN PENA (26)
8TH	CHUCK COTTIER (52)
	JOHN DEMERIT (72)
	DON DILLARD (71)
	BRUCE SUTTER (55)
	JEFF FRANCOEUR (24)
9TH	JULIO NAVARRO (72)
	PAT ROCKETT (53)
	OTIS NIXON (49)
	JAY POWELL (36)
10TH	JACK DITTMER (80)
11TH	JACK CURTIS (71)
	HANK FISCHER (68)
	BEN RIVERA (40)
13TH	LARRY JASTER (64)
	JOSE CAPELLAN (27)
14TH	SANDY VALDESPINO (69)
	TERRY FORSTER (56)
	TONY BRIZZOLARA (51)
15TH	MIKE MARSHALL (65)
	RAY KING (34)
17TH	TYLER HOUSTON (37)
19TH	KEVIN COFFMAN (43)
20TH	OZZIE GUILLEN (44)
21ST	DARRYL MOTLEY (48)
	CHRIS HAMMOND (42)
	WIL LEDEZMA (27)
22ND	JEFF TREADWAY (45)
23RD	CHARLIE SPIKES (57)
	ALAN EMBREE (38)
	MARK WOHLERS (38)
25TH	MEL ROACH (75)
	ED GOODSON (60)
	JUNIOR MOORE (55)
	TERRELL WADE (35)
	PHIL STOCKMAN (28)
26TH	BOB UECKER (73)
	KEVIN BLANKENSHIP (45)
27TH	RUSTY RICHARDS (43)
28TH	LARVELL BLANKS (58)
	FREDI GONZALEZ (44)
	JERMAINE DYE (34)
29TH	JOHN FULLER (58)
	JASON SCHMIDT (35)
	BRIAN EDMONDSON (35)
30TH	AL VEIGEL (91)
	DAVE JOHNSON (65)

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TRIBUTE TO TBS

BRAVES GAMES on TBS are gone but not forgotten. Proof comes the evening of Feb. 2 when the Braves 400 Club holds its annual winter banquet, known as the Gameboree.

The theme of this year's 42nd annual event is "30 years of TBS and the Braves." All the broadcasters you welcomed into your home to describe Braves games on TBS for the last three decades will be invited to attend, as will the players who were part of the top 10 Braves moments on TBS. These range - in year of occurrence - from Gene Garber striking out Pete Rose to end his 44-game hitting streak in 1978 to John Smoltz winning his 200th game last season.

There's no telling who will or won't attend, but it should be a gala celebration of Braves baseball - as it always is. One man who can be counted on is Braves Hall of Famer Pete Van Wieren, who has committed to serve as emcee.

The proceedings will take place at the Marriott Century Center Hotel, located just off I-85 North at the Clairmont Rd. exit.

Remember, this event is open to the public. You do not have to be a member of the 400 Club. Tickets are $60 per person, increasing to $65 after Jan. 14. For tickets or more information, call the club's hotline at (770) 416-4539 or visit braves400.org.

Speaking of TBS, fans should take advantage of this wakeup call to explore how they can continue to get Braves games on TV. Fans in the Southeast are used to getting all or most of the games on regular TV, and likely will be able to continue to do so, though details are not complete. Those outside the Southeast have only been getting 70 games - 43 percent of the schedule - on TBS the last couple of years, as well as those shown by Fox and ESPN.

Most fans, however, regardless of where they live, can get *all* or nearly all games on TV and radio. Look for much more information about this in the February ChopTalk. In the meantime, check the Major League Baseball Extra Innings package with your local cable provider or with DirecTV, visit MLB.com for web-based video and audio opportunities, and don't forget that all games are on XM Radio.

These are not free options, but they definitely are not cost prohibitive for most people. They do require initiative on your part, though, so don't wait until the last minute. Get started now, and chances are you'll be watching or listening to *more* Braves baseball than you have in years.

Every month we get calls from subscribers who believe their ChopTalk is late in arriving. We appreciate your interest and devotion, but please keep in mind that we cannot consider an issue late or replace it until the 10th of the month.

ChopTalk goes to press and is mailed on time *every* month. Once we turn it over to the post office, however, it is out of our control - just like your other mail is. Most people get relatively quick delivery, but some don't.

We suggest that you do not call us until the 10th, because that saves both of us a call. Additionally, if you believe your copy is late, we strongly suggest that you contact your local post office - in person or by phone - and ask that they issue a "postal watch" on your issue. We find that this often speeds service in the future.

ChopTalk is mailed on a "periodical" permit, just as "major" magazines are. Because we have relatively small circulation, though, ChopTalk isn't always handled properly by the postal service. At least that's what they tell us!

It's an issue we deal with all the time, but we have to give them time to work your magazine through the system - whether in a timely manner, as most people receive, or on a somewhat delayed schedule. That's why we ask that you wait until the 10th to call. We appreciate your understanding.

Happy New Year to all... and don't forget to enter our photo contest for a chance to win some great prizes (see pg. 5)!

THIS ISSUE OF CHOPTALK was mailed Dec. 20. The February issue will be mailed Jan. 22.

Brian McCann and Chipper Jones with supporters (L-R) Kerren Merritt, Dreama Gibson and Ronnie Kihlstadius at the Fox Theatre, where they helped raise $176,000 for childhood cancer research.

BY **PATTY RASMUSSEN**

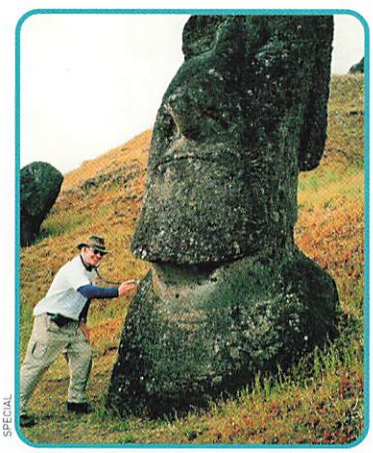
IT'S RALLY TIME

THE RALLY FOUNDATION'S Inaugural Benefit Bash was deemed a rousing success after raising $176,000 for the Rally Foundation for Childhood Cancer Research Nov. 15. **Brian McCann** was the event host, but was supported in the cause by **Chipper Jones**, **Tom Glavine** and **Chuck James** and James' wife, **Julie**. Also in attendance were former Braves pitching coach **Leo Mazzone**, Orioles pitcher **Kris Benson**, Arizona Diamond-backs pitcher **Micah Owings**, and former Super Bowl coach **Sam Wyche** (Bengals). The event was held in the stunning Egyptian Ballroom and Grand Salon at the historic Fox Theater in Midtown Atlanta. Over 300 guests enjoyed cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, food stations, and an extensive silent auction, filled with sports memorabilia, gift baskets, trips, spa visits and much more. Glavine had the honor of presenting the inaugural Rally for Research Award to his good friend, **Jim Guadagno**, former baseball systems operator for the Braves and now baseball promotions manager for Mizuno USA. Guadagno was instrumental in helping establish the Foundation, lending Mizuno's corporate support to such promotions as Money in the Mitt, an annual bubblegum blowing contest/ fundraiser that takes place during the season. Later in the evening, a live auction was held with two items up for bid - catering for 12 from Carole Parks Catering, and a Labradoodle puppy. They went going for close to $4,000 each.

PATTY RASMUSSEN

FORMER BRAVES PHYSICIAN Dr. John Cantwell's off-season trip to Easter Island in the south Pacific, the most remote inhabited place on earth, netted an interesting find. While there, Cantwell examined one of the famed Moai statues and found it to be in good condition. Cantwell says he estimated its age to be almost as old as former Braves first baseman **Julio Franco**! ...

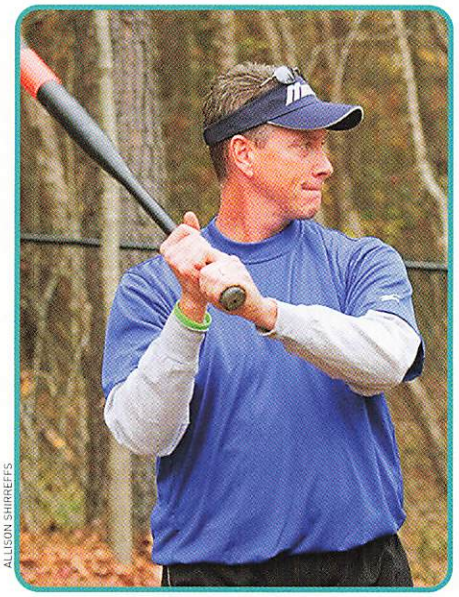
John Smoltz participated in the ninth annual Thanksgiving Dish, sponsored by the Atlanta Community Food Bank, Nov. 20. This year, Smoltz and members of the Atlanta media prepared 2,007 Thanksgiving meals for needy families in the Atlanta area. Later that day, Smoltz, his son, **Andrew**, and former Brave **Horacio Ramirez** flew to Kansas City to see his beloved Michigan State Spartans battle UCLA in the CBE Classic finals. Ramirez, an avid UCLA Bruins fan, was in the Atlanta area to celebrate Thanksgiving with his longtime girlfriend, **Veronica Palacios**, and her family. Smoltz chartered a jet to fly the group up and back, and it was a long flight back for him, because his Spartans were defeated, 68-63. The next day, Smoltz boarded a flight to Arizona where he spent the Thanksgiving holiday with his parents. The highlight of his stay was a visit to the local German Club where his father plays accordion every Friday night. ...



SPECIAL

Former Braves physician Dr. John Cantwell examines a statue on Easter Island he compared to Julio Franco.

Congratulations to **Brian** and **Ashley McCann** on their marriage, Dec. 1. Approximately 250 family and friends attended the nuptials held at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in downtown Atlanta, with a reception immediately following at the Atlanta History Center in the Buckhead section of the city. **Sherry McCann**, mother of the groom, described the evening as, "magical and enchanted." Brian's brother, Brad, served as the best man, and **Jeff Francoeur** served as a groomsman. Among the guests from the Braves organization were Francoeur and his wife, **Catie**, **Blaine Boyer** and wife, **Ginsey**, **Kelly Johnson** and fiancée **Lauren**


ALLISON SHIRREFFS

Host Tom Glavine prepares to take a cut in a backyard Wiffle ball game for charity at his home.

Thacker, **Tim** and **Kim Hudson**, **John Smoltz**, **Chipper Jones**, **Clint Sammons** and wife, **Meredith**, **Wes Timmons**, **John Schuerholz** and wife, **Karen**, **Frank Wren**, **Terry Pendleton** and wife, **Catherine**, **Brian Snitker** and wife, **Ronnie**, **Chino Cadahia** and wife, **Lynne**, and Braves Hall of Fame scout and executive **Paul Snyder** and his wife, **Petie**. Former teammates and friends in attendance included **Mark DeRosa** (Cubs) and wife, **Heidi**, **Adam LaRoche** (Pirates) and wife, **Jenn**, **Andruw Jones** (Dodgers) and wife, **Nicole**, **Kyle Davies** (Royals), **Chris Woodward** and wife, **Erin**, and **Jeremy Hermida** (Marlins). The couple honeymooned in Hawaii...

Immediately after signing with the Braves, **Tom Glavine** and his family joined former teammate, pitcher **Pete Smith**, and his family on a Thanksgiving week trip to the Cayman Islands. The relaxing family vacation included plenty of golf, both regular and putt-putt. On Dec. 2, Glavine, his wife, **Chris**, and sons **Peyton** (8) and **Mason** (7), enjoyed lunch and a Wiffle ball game for two families who have been affected by childhood cancer. The "Day with the Glavines" was auctioned off at Chris' "Tribute to Our Quiet Heroes" luncheon (CT Nov. '07) and donated to the two families. And in February, the Glavines will host the 16th annual Tom Glavine's Spring Training to benefit the Georgia Transplant Foundation (GTF). The event will take place Feb. 8, from 7:30 to 11 p.m. at the Georgia Aquarium in downtown Atlanta. Attendees can take on the special celebrity guests in a Vegas style night of casino games, blackjack, poker and other games. The highly successful event has raised millions of dollars for GTF, bringing in $500,000 last year alone. Silent and live auctions round out the evening. Past items include trips to Italy, hard-to-get concert tickets, and, as always, autographed sports memorabilia. Top-level sponsors will enjoy a pre-event cocktail reception with Glavine and a private tour of the aquarium. Sponsorship opportunities for the event begin at $1,000 (pair of tickets). For more information, visit gatransplant.org...

Brian Snitker, wife, **Ronnie**, their daughter, **Erin**, son, **Troy**, and Brian's sister, **Angela Jachetti**, served meals during Hosea Feed the Hungry and Homeless held on Thanksgiving Day at Turner Field. The family was at Turner Field from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m., serving meals and talking with the families. Erin, a Mercer University nursing student, and Troy, who attends Valdosta State University, worked the dessert counter. Afterward, the Snitkers enjoyed a family dinner at home with members of Brian's and Ronnie's families...

Catcher **Clint Sammons** and his wife, **Meredith**, celebrated their first wedding anniversary with a week-long trip to Mexico in late November. Sammons had to squeeze in the trip between attending weddings for **Jeff Francoeur** and **Brian McCann**.

(L-R) Rebecca and David Justice, composer Paul Williams and his wife, Mariana, and Amy and Steve Finley at a benefit to raise money for the victims of Southern California wildfires.

HOT STUFF

ALTHOUGH THEY LOST their home to the devastating Southern California wildfires, **David Justice** and his wife, **Rebecca**, joined with several fellow major leaguers, including **Steve Finley** (free agent) and his wife, **Amy**, **Trevor Hoffman** (Padres), **Mike Sweeney** (free agent), **Dave Roberts** (Giants) and **Mark Sweeney** (free agent), as well as other friends and neighbors in hosting a party Dec. 8 to benefit victims of the wildfires. Over 700 guests showed up for the event that netted in excess of $130,000 for Operation USA, a humanitarian organization that helps rebuild lives after natural or man-made disasters. The party was held at Finley's home in Rancho Santa Fe, a San Diego suburb. Composer **Paul Williams**, winner of four Oscars, contributed a unique item to the live auction. He offered to write and record a song for the top bidder, who paid $17,500 for the honor.

TALKIN' CHOP

LETTERS & PHOTOS FROM OUR READERS

WHETHER YOU'RE HAVING FUN AT TURNER FIELD, EXPERIENCING A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH YOUR FAVORITE BRAVES PLAYER, OR JUST SHOWING OFF YOUR COLLECTION OF BRAVES STUFF OR TRYING ON YOUR NEW BRAVES SHIRT, WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT AND SEE A PICTURE.

WITH THIS BAND, I THEE WED!

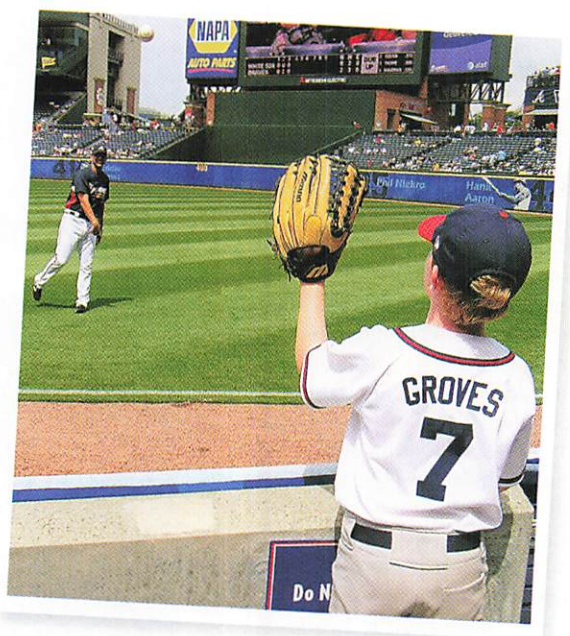
We recently got married and wanted to share these pictures with your readers, because we love ChopTalk! On Sept. 1, we exchanged our wedding vows and "Braves Bands" (L). Ryan has enjoyed Braves baseball for 25 years, and Regan has enjoyed it for the last two years. As we left for our honeymoon, we couldn't forget our newest issue of ChopTalk (see photo, Pg. 4). In our future, we see many spring training trips, Braves charity events, and of course, many winning games!

REGAN & RYAN GOLDBERG
Bonita Springs, Fla.

WHAT A CATCH!

This is our son, Trey Groves, age 9, who got the surprise of his life when his "baseball hero" - Jeff Francoeur - played catch with him between innings at the 2007 pre-season White Sox exhibition game. We want to thank Jeff for his time and for being such a great role model. Our son wrote Jeff's favorite bible verse on the inside of his glove, and he calls this picture: "Field of Dreams."

THE GROVES FAMILY
Buford, Ga.



MOTHERS' DAY

I'm 8-years-old, and my mom took me to spring training in March to see the Braves. Before the game, I spotted my most-favorite player, Brian McCann, and tried to get his autograph, but he was busy getting ready for the game. I was so glad to see him up close but was sad that I didn't get his autograph. A little while later, a lady tapped my mom on the shoulder. She turned out to be Brian McCann's mom, Sherry! She introduced herself and Brian's grandma and gave us her home address to write to Brian. When we got back home, my twin sister, Lily, and I both wrote to him. We were so surprised when we received a great gift package from her with autographs of Brian and his brother, Brad, and lots of other cool things. She wrote us a very nice letter and told us to visit her in the stands at Turner Field. We did visit her on opening weekend, and she was just as nice as we remembered!

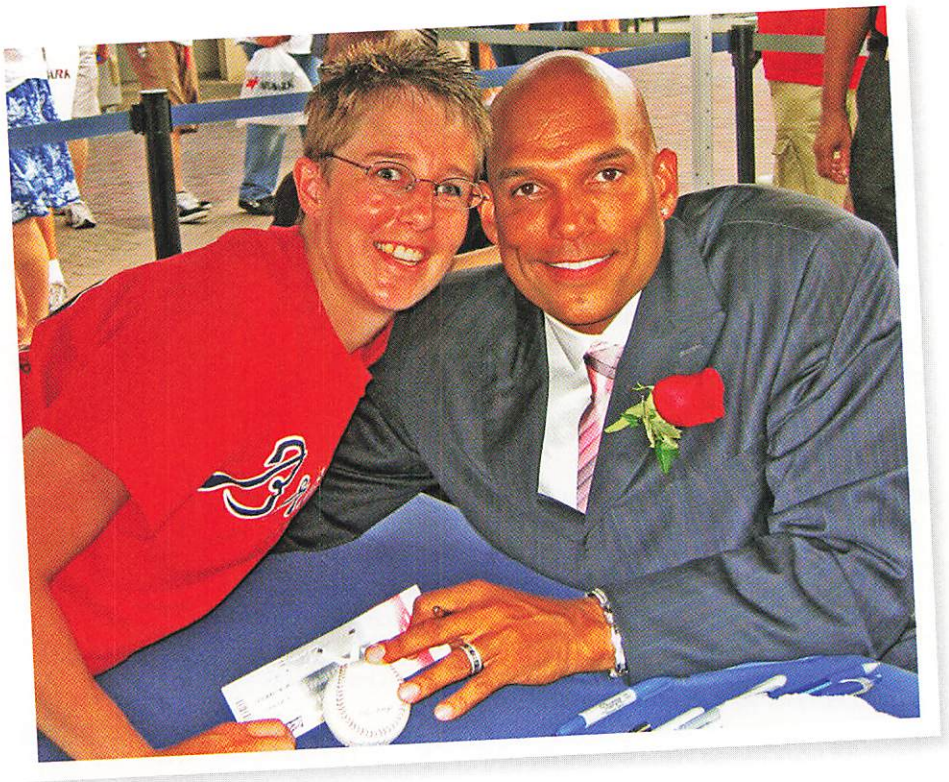
ZACHARY IDRIS
Simpsonville, S.C

CHOPTALK AND THE ATLANTA BRAVES SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

HALL OF FAME FAN

I am a Braves fan because of David Justice. I was so excited when I found out the Braves were inducting him into their Hall of Fame that I flew all the way from Iowa just to see him. I attended the ceremony and went to two games. The highlight of the trip was getting to meet Justice and getting his autograph and having a picture taken with him. As a bonus, I got to meet Mark Teixeira and John Schuerholz. I also got Andruw Jones and John Smoltz autograph baseballs through the brown bag charity. Meeting Justice was the ultimate.

TAMMY HOEG
Ankeny, Iowa



SWEET 16TH

I live in Bristol, Va., and went to my second Braves game on May 26 for my 16th birthday. After the game, we went back to the players' parking lot to see if I could get autographs from my two favorite players - Brian McCann and Jeff Francoeur. I waited 45 minutes, and Jeff Francoeur pulled out and stopped his car and signed for me. He was so generous to stop and acknowledge fans after a long, hot game. Thanks, Jeff!

DEVON FLEENOR
Bristol, Va

SHARE YOUR BRAVES FEVER!

WRITE TO US

Talkin' Chop c/o ChopTalk
P.O. Box 80750
Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750

Letters@ChopTalkonline.com

Letters and photos chosen for publication are subject to editing, and photos cannot be returned. Digital photos are preferred. Home inkjet prints are not high enough quality for us to publish.

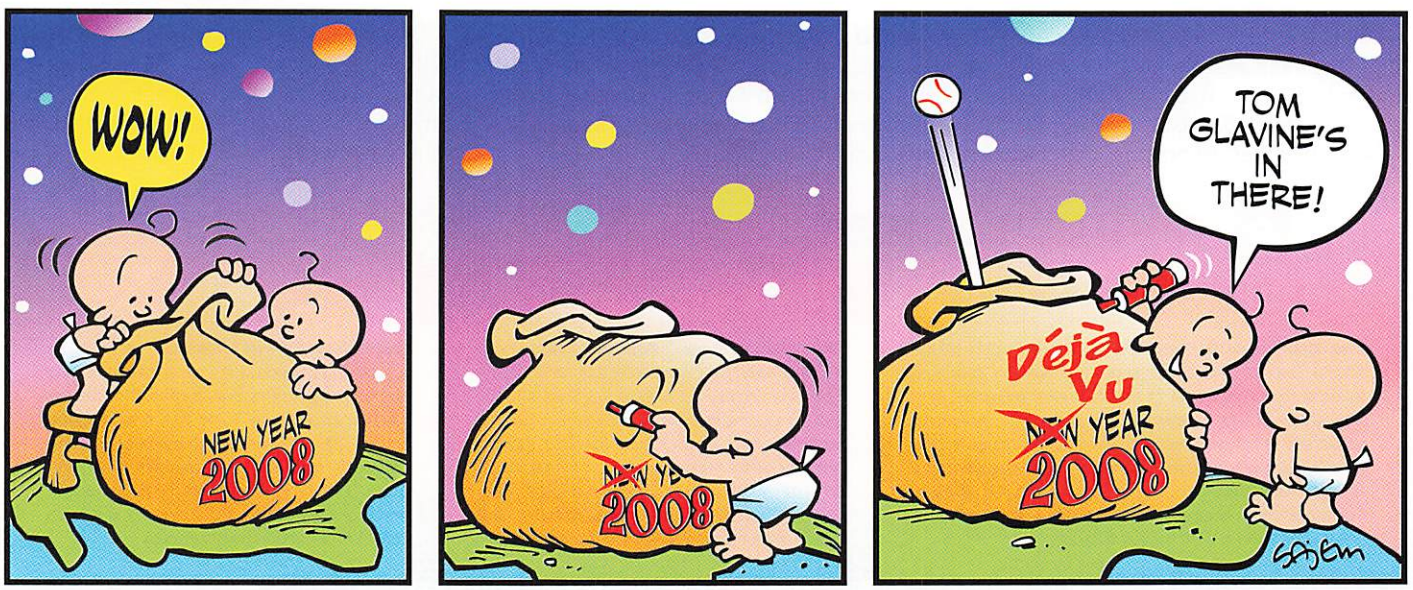
WRITE THE BRAVES

Atlanta Braves
P.O. Box 4064
Atlanta, Ga. 30302

For the Braves players, Bobby Cox, the coaches, broadcasters, or members of the front office.

If you request a response, be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Never send anything of value that you want returned. This is no guarantee of a reply.

IN THE BAG



SOUTHWORTH VOTED INTO COOPERSTOWN

BY GARY CARUSO

THE BRAVES have a new representative among the immortals in the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

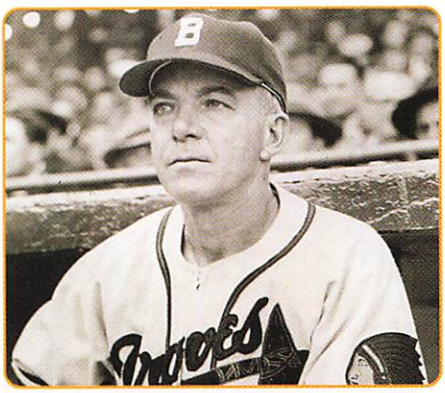
Billy Southworth, the manager who led the Boston Braves out of a long period of horrendous performance to win the 1948 National League pennant, was elected to the Hall of Fame by the Veterans Committee Dec. 3. Southworth, who died in 1969 at age 76, will be enshrined at Cooperstown, N.Y., July 27 with other members of the Class of 2008.

Southworth was one of the hottest commodities in baseball in the 1940s. He took the St. Louis Cardinals to three straight pennants (1942-44) and two World Championships ('42 and '44). After the Cardinals finished a close second in 1945, Southworth was "stolen" by new Braves ownership to bring some life to a franchise that finished in the second division for the previous 11 straight years and hadn't made the World Series since the "miracle" season of 1914.

Construction magnate Lou Perini, who led the group that bought the Braves in 1944, dangled a five-year contract in front of Southworth. The offer included a base salary of $35,000 and a bonus plan - $5,000 for a fourth-place finish, $10,000 for third, $15,000 for second and $20,000 for winning the pennant.

When the Cardinals refused to match the proposal, Southworth jumped ship and the Braves immediately improved - finishing fourth in 1946, third in '47, and winning the pennant and going to the World Series in '48. After the 1947 season, his base salary was raised to $50,000, making him the highest-paid manager in baseball.

A 16-member committee that included Phil Niekro voted on candidates in the managers/umpires classification. Southworth received 13 votes, the same as Dick Williams, the other manager elected (81 percent; 12 votes or 75 percent was required).



NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME

Billy Southworth led the Braves to the 1948 NL pennant and their only World Series appearance between the 1914 "miracle" season and the 1957 World Championship.

Another committee voted on executives/pioneers and elected former commissioner Bowie Kuhn and former owners Walter O'Malley (Dodgers) and Barney Dreyfuss (Pirates). Players no longer on the baseball writers ballot were not considered by the Veterans Committee but will be voted on next year.

In 13 seasons managing the Cardinals and Braves, Southworth won nearly 60 percent of his games and never finished in the second division. He's now one of only 18 managers voted into the shrine.

Southworth also had a 13-year playing career as a speedy outfielder of exceptional fielding ability. He spent three seasons (1921-23) with the Braves, hitting .308 or better in all three.

Perini was an innovative owner who was willing to spend money on players and also to upgrade many other aspects of Braves baseball. He'd made many improvements that helped convince Southworth that the franchise was heading in the right direction and that a move to Boston could be productive.

Southworth ran a tough spring training camp in his first season, 1946, instilling discipline and hustle that Boston's National League franchise had not known for a long time. He stressed fundamentals, including bunting, which was a big part of his strategy, as was platooning.

The Braves responded by winning 81 games, their best total since 1933. They won 86 games and moved up a notch to third place in '47, then won 91 games and the pennant in '48 - out-distancing the Cardinals, who Southworth abandoned, by 6 1/2 games.

The Braves lost the World Series to Cleveland in six games, then quickly came apart. Players began to resent Southworth's strict tactics, and when the 1949 team failed to meet expectations, he was so distraught that he took a leave of absence in August. By mid-1951, he was forced to resign for health reasons.

Overall, Southworth was 424-358 (.542) with the Braves and 1,044-704 (.597) for his career. His winning percentage is fifth all-time and third among managers with 1,000 or more victories.

FAN CLUBS

BRAVES 400 CLUB

The Braves 400 Club is the official fan club of the Atlanta Braves. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting baseball at all levels. Annual membership is $25 and includes a newsletter and the opportunity to participate in activities such as road trips, luncheons, the annual banquet, and charitable events. Send payment to: Braves 400 Club, P.O. Box 7689, Atlanta, Ga. 30309. For more information, call the organization's hotline at (770) 416-4539 or visit braves400.org.

MILWAUKEE BRAVES HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

The Milwaukee Braves Historical Association is a non-profit organization that promotes the memory of the Milwaukee Braves (1953-65). Annual membership is $25 and includes a newsletter. Send payment to: Milwaukee Braves Historical Association, c/o Express News, W130 N10437 Washington Dr., Germantown, Wisc. 53022. For more information, call (414) 347-1212 or visit milwaukeebraveshistoricalassociation.com.

BOSTON BRAVES HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

The Boston Braves Historical Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to keeping alive the memory of the Braves in the city where the franchise began in 1871 and that it represented through 1952. Annual membership is $15 and includes a newsletter. Send payment to: Boston Braves Historical Association, P.O. Box 5668, Marlboro, Mass. 01752. For more info, call (508) 485-1423 or visit Boston-braves.com.

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5	July 4	Astros	Publix Fireworks Extravaganza
6	July 31	Cardinals	Wild West Night
7	Aug. 16	Giants	Gate Giveaway Day
8	Sept. 7	Nationals	Bark in the Park II
9	Sept. 21	Mets	Final Regular Season Home Game

MANAGER _____

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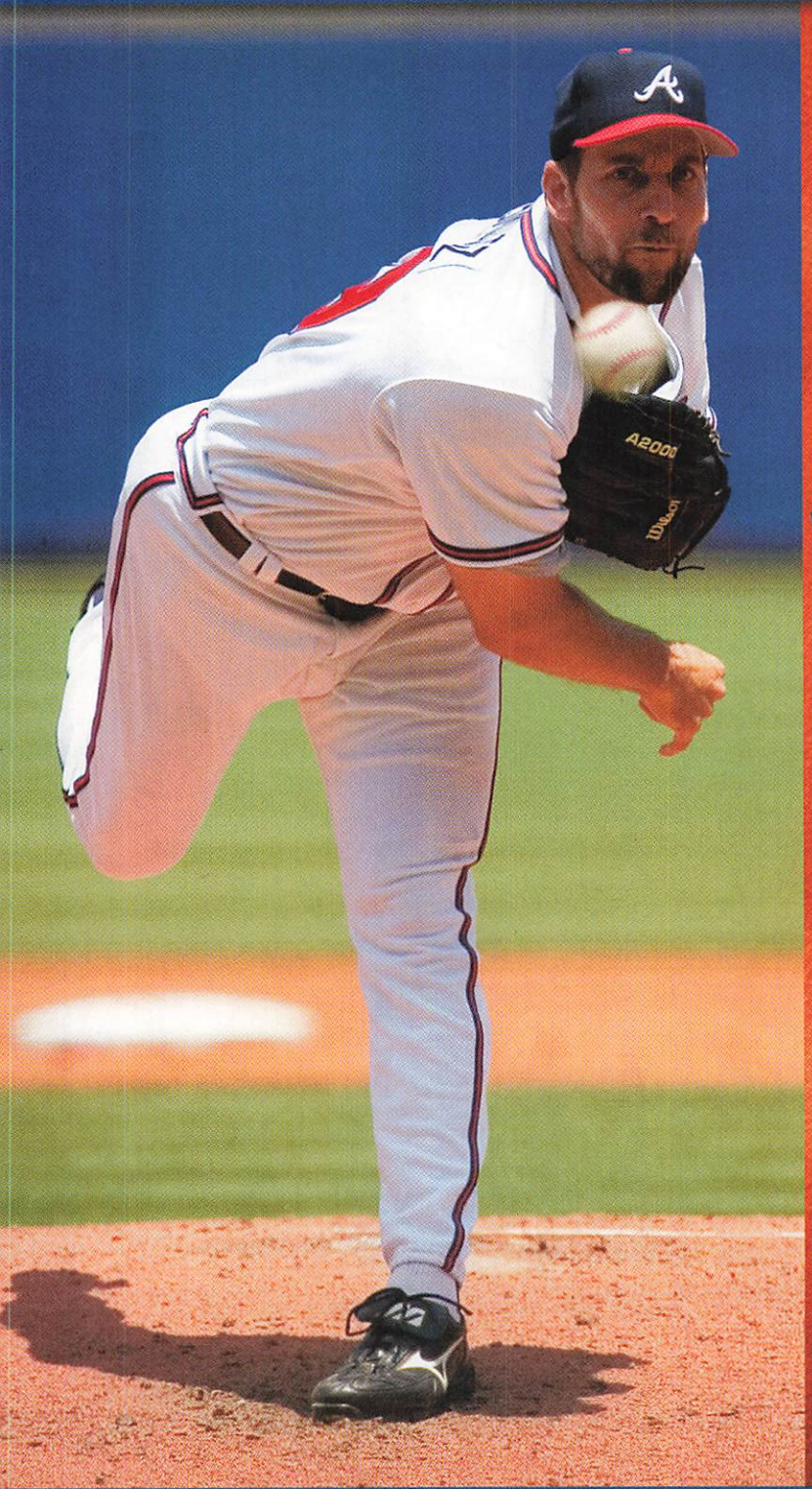

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